

MYTHIC ARCHETYPES: WELSH MYTHOLOGY IN TOLKIEN'S *LORD OF THE RINGS*

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MYTHIC ARCHETYPES: WELSH MYTHOLOGY IN TOLKIEN'S *LORD OF THE RINGS*

A Thesis

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Abstract
of
MYTHIC ARCHETYPES: WELSH MYTHOLOGY IN TOLKIEN'S *LORD OF THE RINGS*
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The purpose of *Mythic Archetypes* is to investigate Tolkien's involvement with Welsh language, mythology, and history. Tolkien's goal was to write a mythology for the people of England, and devise a "Secondary World" with real world or "Primary World" attributes. The thesis focuses on British Celtic, or native Welsh, language, mythology, and history and examines how these three ingredients reflect Tolkien's "Primary World" truth. Finally, the overall intention is to contribute to the conversation about Celtic literature and the fantasy genre.

The thesis examines Welsh mythology for background information. The criterion for this reviews some of the following literature: *The Mabinogion*, *Trioedd ynes Prydein: the Welsh Triads*, *The Mabinogi and Other Welsh Tales*, *The Four Ancient Books of Wales*, and *Welsh Celtic Myth in Modern Fantasy*. Then, the thesis focuses on Tolkien's involvement with Welsh and the parallel in his "Secondary World," Middle-earth. The criterion for this portion reviews some of the following literature: *The Lord of the Rings*, *Angles and Britons O'Donnell Lectures*, *Myth and Middle Earth*, *The Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien*, and *J.R.R. Tolkien: A Biography*. Finally, after full examination of all relevant literature, the thesis was written.

The principal conclusion found Tolkien involved with Welsh language, mythology and its history. British Celtic language and history merged into the narrative design of his epic, thus, working as spiritual "Primary World" reflections, comprising the heart and soul of Middle-earth.

Mythic Archetypes opened broadly, charting Tolkien's involvement with Welsh language and history, and then each chapter focused on individual and spiritual aspects in *The Lord of the Rings*. The results revealed that Welsh language and mythic references provided the truthful, spiritual component Tolkien desired in his fantasy epic.

_____, Committee Chair
Dr. David Toise

Date

PREFACE

Tolkien has been my fantasy writer hero since childhood. The world of Middle-earth inspires new writers and readers across generations, all over the world. His legacy continues even to this day, especially in his native England. A while back I read an article about a poll conducted by the British bookstore chain Waterstones in which the public decided the greatest 100 books of this century. About 25,000 participants cast their votes for an assortment of novels across different genres (“The ‘Unread’ Ulysses is Top Novel of the Century” 1). Ultimately the Book of the Century was none other than *The Lord of the Rings*; I could only imagine the collective gasps from scholars and academics alike that a fantasy novel beat out countless others to earn the Book of the Century title! But, perhaps, for some this was not a huge surprise. After all, in his letters Tolkien expressed a strong desire to create a mythology for the people of England. But eventually it became more than just English mythology; Tolkien gave the world a British epic.

For me, the mythology and language in *The Lord of the Rings* are the most exciting. While reading Middle-earth I am transported into the microcosm worlds of Elves, men of Númenor (Aragorn’s lineage), orcs and Ents. The intricate, detailed designs of his languages, like Sindarian, leave me in awe. How meticulous and patient Tolkien must have been crafting these languages! Over the last 60 years, critics have gathered mythic-influence comparisons from Anglo-Saxon, Finnish, Old Norse, Germanic, Gothic and Celtic. It is always the latter which especially attracts my attention. By today’s standards, Celtic would normally imply Gaelic (Irish) in addition to Welsh. But for the purpose of this thesis I focus on the Welsh content. I believe Welsh has not been given enough adequate attention and certainly deserves another look.

So, why Welsh? After reading Tolkien’s lecture entitled “English and Welsh” in *Monsters and the Critics* and *The Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien* – the latter compiled by Tolkien’s

biographer Humphrey Carpenter and his third son and literary executor Christopher Tolkien – I began my Welsh exploration. Welsh language emerged from its common British Celtic parent Brythonic or Briton. We know Tolkien read the *Red Book of Hergest*, the *Mabinogion*, and other Welsh tales in Welsh and their English translations. Peter Berresford Ellis, a prominent Celtic authority, argues that when “studying Celtic mythology, it is essential to study Celtic languages in which that mythology is first recorded” (5). As a philologist, or someone who explores historical linguistics and literary studies, Tolkien did just that. From the Welsh *Red Book of Hergest* manuscripts Tolkien would have gleaned colorful and descriptive, albeit slightly disconnected, bits of Welsh mythology.

By the end I hope to present clearer evidence that due to Tolkien’s fascination with the language, Welsh worked its way into the spiritual aspects of this great epic. Welsh mythology is being revitalized more than ever in North America, Britain and across the world. It is my hope this thesis helps contribute to the Celtic part of the conversation about comparative mythology in fantasy literature.

DEDICATION

*To my wonderful, loving and supportive family – Kathy, Tony and Chrissy Perlongo –
you are always my inspiration*

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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

Tolkien scholars over the years have analyzed a melting pot of mythological influences in *The Lord of the Rings* – Anglo-Saxon, Finnish, Old Norse, Germanic, Gothic and Celtic. Often critics mull over more obvious Teutonic (Germanic) and Scandinavian influences because of Tolkien’s Anglo-Saxon professorship at Oxford University, and because of his linguistic passion for all things “Middle English and ... Icelandic” (Carpenter 137). Over the years, Celtic influences have been examined by scholars but not in much depth. Many are missing half the story. Tolkien scholar Marjorie Burns argues there is a Teutonic-Celtic joining in *Lord of the Rings* leading to a harmonious, balanced appeal: “An all-Teutonic world or an all-Celtic one would have far less appeal; but the two, working together, give Middle-earth both Celtic enchantment and Norse vitality” (10). I certainly agree with Burns; a Celtic motif provides a spiritual counterpoint to the physical Norse, Saxon (Germanic) legends. However I believe Tolkien’s involvement with Celtic in *Lord of the Rings* goes one step further. I propose British Celtic (native Welsh) language, mythology, and history reflect truth in Tolkien’s fantasy. One lends itself to the other, not necessarily implying a hierarchical relationship but a co-dependent bond. If Teutonic forms his epic’s corporal narrative body, three Welsh pieces (language, history, and mythology) provides its collective soul. These three pieces are found in the Welsh *Mabinogion*, the oldest collection of British tales, and in other Welsh tales. In essence, Tolkien’s mythology for the people of England ends up possessing a decisively British heart.

Allow me to expand more on what I mean by Welsh influence and why these elements are crucial toward the development of his fantasy world. In his essay “Fairy-stories,” Tolkien provides an inside look on how he approaches fantasy. He explains good storytellers are actually “sub-creators,” and persuasive storytelling suspends disbelief in the “Primary World” and transports the

audience to a believable, elaborate “Secondary World” (*Monsters* 122). However, once “disbelief arises, the spell is broken; the magic, or rather art, has failed” (132). Language and history are merely “stories ... bound up with its [native] tongue and soil” and are incredibly important to creating believable narratives; suddenly, the art of storytelling, as if by magic, transforms into a higher art form (*Letters* 144). Great storytellers understand the importance of diction while retelling oral legends, so it is no coincidence that reciting tales compares to casting magic, as both require a certain performance of speech. Tolkien echoes this, saying, “*spell* means both a story told, and a formula of power over living men” (*Monsters* 128). Capturing an audience through creative words is powerful magic, an art and skill Tolkien beautifully masters. His art bridges the “Secondary World” of Middle-earth with the “Primary World” of Welsh mythology. For example, the language of Elves – Sindarin – has British Celtic similarities; Elves are native creatures of Middle-earth, like the Welsh to Britain. With this reflection of truth, Middle-earth becomes a real place in ancient history. Welsh, with its “modifications and distortions in vocalic and consonantal sounds,” give legends a distinctive British taste and lyrical harmony (Parry-Williams 44). Also, Tolkien intentionally names places and people to sound and look Welsh (*Monsters* 197). Welsh mythology is part of the land and Tolkien argues, “Welsh is of this soil, this island, the senior language of the men of Britain; and Welsh is beautiful” (*Monsters* 189). In his “Secondary World,” language is foreground to stories; indeed, Middle-earth’s initial conception was primarily an escapade to show that “expressions of linguistic taste [and language] could have a function” (*Letters* 214). Normally, manipulating language creates stories; Tolkien created languages first and stories thereafter.

While contemplating his narrative design, Tolkien read ancient myths across different lands. These myths helped enrich his search for truth in mythologies. In fact, these legends made him think like a chef finalizing his signature dish. How does a great storyteller add his spice to the conversation? Like a cook, bits of ancient history are added “...to the Pot of Soup, the

Cauldron of Story” giving different flavors to narrative legends (*Monsters* 123). The Cauldron is always cooking, boiling even, and there are new tidbits added over time – by new cooks (123). One of the greatest figures of ancient myth and history the legendary Arthur has roots in Celtic myth. This is a reflection of truth sometimes overlooked and ignored. One of the many places associated with the King, Arthur’s Stone, is at Cefn Bryn on the Gower Peninsula of West Glamorgan, Wales (*Arthur Tradition* 13). Arthur, too, has been stirred into the Cauldron stewing with new ingredients. In the beginning Arthur might have been just a man, or a warrior chief like in the *Mabinogion*. So this Welsh Arthur, says Tolkien:

once historical ... was also put into the Pot. There he was boiled for a long time, together with many other older figures and devices, of mythology and Faërie, and even some other stray bones of history ... until he emerged as a King of Faërie. (*Monsters* 126)

Arthur remains in the Cauldron, simmering, until the cook or storyteller serves his new dish to his awaiting, hungry audience. This blurring, merging of history and language creates a new piece of narrative: a new story. So by skillfully crafting his world incorporating language and history, Tolkien, as master chef, designs the initial blueprints for *The Lord of the Rings*:

to make a Secondary World inside which the green sun will be credible, commanding Secondary Belief, will probably require labour and thought, and will certainly demand a special skill, a kind of elvish craft ... when they are attempted and in any degree accomplished then we have a rare achievement of Art: indeed narrative art (*Monsters* 140)

Tolkien seeks truth in mythology because he is “historically minded” as a philologist; this coincides with Middle-earth’s blueprint for not being just an imaginary land but instead a familiar place, an ancient Britain (*Letters* 239). Even the name Middle-earth translates from Middle English “*middle-erde* (or *erthe*), altered from Old English *Middangeard*” the name for “inhabited lands of Men ‘between the seas’” (*Letters* 220). To write this narrative, Tolkien thought it best to dig deep in his own country’s roots, and perhaps within his own spiritual unconscious. After all,

genetically the English are a mixture of Celt and Saxon people that “remained unchanged until the coming of the Normans in the eleventh century” (*Arthurian Tradition* 13).

Is Welsh mythology part of the historical design for *Lord of the Rings*? I propose Welsh is an integral and crucial piece of the master design. Welsh legends and songs preserve traditional landscape names throughout Britain, which would otherwise be lost to ancient memory. Celtic scholar Peter Ellis explains “one cannot walk through any area of a Celtic country without coming to realize, unless one is totally impervious to atmosphere, that geographical features are intrinsic to the myths and legends” (326). Reclaiming ancient heritage is an integral goal for Aragorn, as the histories of his ancestors have passed into myth. Without centuries-old record-keepers – such as Treebeard, Tom Bombadil, and the Elves – new people and new language would have replaced valuable history. In a similar aspect to Welsh being usurped by English language, according to scholar B.G. Charles:

Occasionally the original Welsh name of a place deep in English country has survived in Welsh literature or even in Welsh oral tradition although forgotten in its own locality when replaced by its English name. (87)

Welsh experts believe Celtic myth contributes to its history, too. Emyr Humphreys, a prolific Welsh writer and novelist, has connected Celtic myth and history to Welsh people. According to Humphrey scholar Diane Green, Humphrey makes “a strong connection between myth and history, concepts that are more often distinguished as either separate or opposite in the dichotomy of false/true or fiction/reality” (15). Welsh Professor M. Wynn Thomas explains, “Humphreys sees the legends native to Wales as being the specific produce, and symbolic record of Welsh history” (274), and Humphreys himself contrasts “the false history of Geoffrey [Monmouth]” with “the truth-bearing fiction of the romances of the *Mabinogion*” (Humphreys 13). Lastly, Humphreys states that Welsh history and myth are inextricably linked and that “for the Welsh to distinguish between myth and history has always been a difficult exercise” (13). Like

Humphreys, Tolkien echoes that history “resembles ‘Myth’ because they are both ultimately of the same stuff” (*Monsters* 127). Travelers seeking adventures in *Mabinogion* tales did not physically have to leave Britain to wander into the Otherworld, though some tales did take place in Ireland. Indeed to the Celts it is a place “as simple and real as one might find in the realms of men ... such places lay merely over the next hill” (*Arthurian Tradition* 75). Likewise, when the Fellowship reaches beautiful sanctuaries within the hidden Elven realms, they did not physically leave Middle-earth.

The second chapter of this thesis, “Tolkien’s Engagement with Welsh Language and History,” begins with an in-depth background exploration into Celtic mythology, such as the *Mabinogion*, and also explains the historical division of Celtic language. In addition it also discusses Tolkien’s history with Welsh. Most notably, the chapter discusses Tolkien’s hesitation about being associated with Celtic influences and references. In turn I contend that Tolkien’s mythopoeia has traditional Welsh mythological archetypes within his fiction. I am not trying to reinvent the Celtic wheel but instead adding to the British conversation with Tolkien’s greater connection to Welsh.

After the second chapter, the thesis begins considering British Celtic language, history in Welsh tales and *The Lord of the Rings* by looking at the texts. Throughout this thesis I will be referring back to Tolkien’s notion of “Primary World” and “Secondary World” as reflections of truth. The third chapter of this thesis, “Celtic Elves and the Otherworld,” will begin with an examination of Otherworld realms in British Celtic mythological in the *Mabinogion* and the similarities found in *The Lord of the Rings*. The readings of these texts highlight the blurring of Welsh history and language. In this chapter I question whether the Otherworld also means a higher state of consciousness, like spiritual growth for individuals seeking wisdom – harnessing truth. Characters like Gandalf and Aragorn rise up when faced with life changing events in the

Otherworld. The fourth chapter will examine Celtic Guardians, Tom Bombadil and Treebeard, and how their geographical Otherworld locations influence Tolkien's mythology. Specifically, the chapter will examine why the guardians maintain ancient histories, languages, and protect Middle-earth's landscapes. It will also examine the Welsh poem "Battle of the Trees," and how it influences the March of the Ents. Chapter Five will examine Gandalf's descent into the Otherworld and his later emergence as a stronger spiritual individual. Most notably, this chapter discusses Celtic transmigration of souls and rebirth through sacrifice, a strong theme in Tolkien's narrative. In my final chapter, I will examine Aragorn as Welsh Arthur with his connection to natural landscapes and its influence in his ascension to the throne as Celtic May King. Higher truth and awareness, like Celtic transmigration of souls will be further examined and explained. Indeed, after Arwen and Aragorn's kismet meeting in Rivendell's woods both are keenly aware that they are repeating actions of their ancestors by falling in love. Thus, ultimately, I argue that Welsh language, history and mythology is a central part of Tolkien's spiritual narrative in *The Lord of the Rings*.

Chapter 2

TOLKIEN'S ENGAGEMENT WITH WELSH LANGUAGE AND HISTORY

Welsh Language and British Celtic

As a prominent Anglo-Saxon professor and scholar at Oxford University, Tolkien felt at home with Scandinavian and Germanic. But before Anglo-Saxon, it was the discovery of a wholly intoxicating but “alien” Finnish grammar book that ignited his linguistic taste buds; Tolkien compared its discovery to a wine cellar filled with vintage wine never before tasted (*Letters* 214). Fueled by this discovery, Tolkien's fascination with language and history did not stop there. Indeed, the pleasing look and sound of the “British type of Celtic” or Welsh also piqued his interest (214). Tolkien read mythological, heroic stories in Welsh and also historical documents relating to British Celtic people. Despite his in-depth studies, when the O'Donnell Trust asked Tolkien to present the first lecture of the O'Donnell series at Oxford, Tolkien acknowledged he felt humbled and honored by the prestigious invitation but said he felt undeserving; humbled to be the first lecturer to introduce other impressive Celtic scholars, but undeserving as the lecture series commemorates its late founder Charles James O'Donnell. According to Tolkien, each lecturer should “arouse or strengthen the interest of the English in various departments of Celtic studies, especially those that are concerned with the origins and connexions of the peoples and languages of Britain and Ireland” (*Monsters* 162). However compared to Germanic or Norse, Tolkien felt positively amateur.

Tolkien is most assuredly not an amateur in Welsh. All modesty aside, Tolkien did help raise awareness for Welsh language, history and literature. Throughout his lecture *English and Welsh* he describes how the two groups (Angles and Britons) blend not only in history but also overlap in language. Calling himself a “converted heathen,” Tolkien felt an indescribable attraction towards learning Celtic history of the British Isles, history taking place before Saxon

and Roman invasions (162). His interest in Celtic history and language affected his career. Later, as a professor, he advised novice English philologists to include Welsh in their breadth – as necessary as “Norse or French” and stressed not having “first-hand acquaintance with Welsh and its philology [they will] lack an experience necessary to their business” (*Monsters* 163). Despite having various grammatical differences there is an important link between the two languages: the *i*-mutation or *i*-affection. According to Tolkien:

The problems attending their explanation in English and in Welsh are similar (for instance, the question of the varying parts played by anticipation of ‘vowel harmony’ and by epenthesis), and the study of them together throws light on both ... the phonology of the place-names borrowed by the English in Britain is of great importance for the dating of *i*-mutation” (*Monsters* 188)

As a historian, Tolkien points out that the region is “interconnected in race, culture, history and linguistic fusions ... we who live in this island [Britain] may reflect that it was on this same soil that both [*i*-mutations/*i*-affection] were accomplished” (188). As a philologist, the dynamic process of borrowing or word-imitations between Welsh and English fascinated Tolkien. Indeed, scholar Parry-Williams – who also participated in the O’Donnell lectures – echoes the importance of studying loan words in both languages for greater English understanding saying, “Welsh, since the Old period, has been a phonetically conservative language, whereas English, from the earliest period, has undergone many great and swift changes” (*Angles and Britons* 42). With this knowledge it made sense for Tolkien to study Welsh, as it was not only for personal interest but also for professional reasons. Studying both languages sheds light on budding linguistic beginnings and looks at cultural relations betwixt the neighboring peoples.

With talk about Celtic, British Celtic, Welsh and English one has to wonder: who are, or were, the Celts? Historically speaking, an answer to this can be very lengthy. Citizens of the United Kingdoms of Great Britain and Northern Ireland can possess multiple cultural identities being simultaneously British and Scottish, or British and Welsh, or just English if they choose.

The short answer is that Celts are native British inhabitants, long before Saxons and Romans invaded and subjugated with their language and legends. Welsh Goddesses in the *Mabinogion* – Rhiannon, Arianrhod, Cerridwen, Blodeuwedd – were established long before Saxons, Angles and Danes brought similar versions to Britain (Graves 403). Thus the mythology of Celtic Gods and heroes:

are the natural inhabitants of a British landscape, not seemingly foreign and out of place in a scene where there is no wine or olive, but “shading in with” out homely oak and bracken, gorse and heath. (Squire 4)

Their empire expanded until finally pushed back by the Saxons to the north western division of Europe, now known as the United Kingdom (Ellis 5). According to Burns, the word *Britain* is Celtic, “but it is the Anglo-Saxons who gave their name to England and they who are seen as the power at Britain’s core” (14). The Welsh language was almost extirpated, at the very least certainly backed into a corner. But surprisingly, despite centuries of word-borrowing and language suppression, native Welsh is still spoken in the modern world.

Subdivision is the most confusing aspect with Celtic languages. Around seventh century BC it split into two main branches, P-Celts and Q-Celts, and then further subdivided into different dialects (Ellis 5). Old Irish, Manx (Isle of Man) and Scottish spoke Goidelic, from the Q-Celtic dialect; Welsh, Cornish and Breton spoke Brythonic, or the P-Celtic dialect (5). Brythonic (indigenous Britons, British, or simply British Celtic) is native to Britain and the basis for Old, Medieval and Modern Welsh. There is a slight but noticeable difference between both P- and Q-dialects. For example:

... the word for “son” in Irish is mac; in Welsh this became map and in modern Welsh is shortened to ap ... thus the “Q” is substituted for the “P” and hence the identification of “P” and “Q” Celtic and perhaps the origin of the phrase about “minding your ‘p’s and q’s.” (5)

Tolkien was immediately drawn to Welsh phonetic structure. He wrote emphatically that Elvish was deliberately constructed to be “(a) ... European kind in style and structure (not in detail); and

(b) to be specifically pleasant” and this led to the creation of Welsh-like Sindarin (*Letters* 175, 219). For the indigenous Elves this generated the proper mood, history and mythology for Middle-earth. Also the names of Bree-men and Hobbit Stoors were chosen to “resemble the survival of Celtic elements in England” because they had certain “style ... [which] feel[s] vaguely to be ‘Celtic’” (*The Lord of the Rings* 1135). Tolkien deliberately reflects native speech of Britain’s ancestors:

The living language of the Western Elves (*Sindarin* or Grey-Elven) is the only usually met, especially in names. This is derived from an origin common to it and Quenya; but the changes have been deliberately devised to give it a linguistic character very like (though not identical with) British-Welsh: because that character is one that I find, in some linguistic moods, very attractive; and because it seems to fit the rather ‘Celtic’ type of legends and stories told of its speakers. (*Letters* 176)

However, as mentioned previously, there are two Celtic subdivisions: P- and Q-Celtic. What about the other subdivision? Could Old Irish be part of Middle-earth? Unfortunately, Gaelic was not looked upon favorably. Welsh attracted his attention, not Irish: “I am concerned in any case only with ‘P-Celts’ and among those with the speech-ancestors of the Welsh” (*Monsters* 173). Tolkien did not dislike Ireland and its people – he read a lot of Irish literature – but he found its ancient language “wholly unattractive” and so would probably not have found it useful in his overall design in Middle-earth (*Letters* 289). Conversely, the Welsh tongue has a “seniority which we cannot overtake” (*Monsters* 177). Thus, it is clear British Celtic is his choice.

First Attraction to Welsh Language

Tolkien’s attraction to the versatility and beauty of Welsh began before understanding the implication of philology. In a letter to W.H. Auden, many years later once finding and enjoying his professional career, Tolkien explains how his connection to language, mythology and history provides happiness towards his own personal search for truth:

... modern historical philology, which appealed to the historical and scientific side, but for the first time the student of a language out of mere love: I mean for the acute aesthetic pleasure derived from a language for its own sake, not only free from being useful but free from being the ‘vehicle of a literature.’ (*Letters* 213)

The ‘aesthetically-pleasing sensation’ began after viewing “Welsh names ... even if only seen on coal-trucks” and it greatly upset him he could not learn more, despite asking (213). But finally, as an Oxford undergraduate, he discovered the *Red Book of Hergest*, an ancient manuscript, and Lady Charlotte Guest’s *Mabinogion* translation, full of Welsh lore and history. With the start of these texts the mysteries of British Celtic language, history and mythology finally begin to unravel its long kept secrets.

As previously mentioned, the findings left a lasting impression to the design of Elvish Sindarin, which “resemble[s] Welsh phonologically ... [has] a relation to High-elven similar to that existing between British (properly so-called, sc. the Celtic languages spoken in this island at the time of the Roman Invasion) and Latin” (*Letters* 219). That did not mean Tolkien knew Welsh inside and out like a native speaker. Indeed, though never completely fluent in Welsh, Tolkien did teach it at Leeds University before his professorship at Oxford (*Letters* 13). Interestingly, as a reader in the faculty department, he fought to establish friendlier relations between linguistic (language) and literary studies (mythology) in his classroom, as students were normally forced to choose one, and the departments would not work together (13). In a fairly radical move he decided to implement a variety of voluntary texts – perhaps even the *Mabinogion* – to study both disciplines in his classroom. This attracted “more than fifteen students” from outside departments (13). In previous years, his students were solely linguistics majors. Evidently this pattern of blending linguistics and literary studies early in his career made an impression on his professional writing, too.

Tolkien felt he lacked “cultural aspects and features” because his vocation as a philologist did not allow much into that area, and cultural features were beyond his precise levels

of comfort (*Letters* 174). He felt comfortable talking about the mechanics, structure and history of language. Nonetheless, in *Return of King*, he includes historical, ethnographical and linguistic matter in the Appendices. He gave much thought into the relationship between “Languages (and Writing), and Peoples and Translation” thus looking at the sum of all parts, analyzing the cultural aspects of the types of people (like Elves or Ents) using his languages, and finishing his work as a whole fantasy universe (174). Despite reiterating ad nauseam “language is the most important” in *Lord of the Rings*, the creation of his Appendices after his narrative links language with history; Tolkien pays close attention to the cultural aspect of his speakers prior to the conception of English language – Westron or Common Tongue in Middle-earth – because English “could not have been the language of any people *at that time* [emphasis mine]” (175). This may be a somewhat small aside, but it shows greater depth for Welsh. Sindarin is historically and linguistically Tolkien’s “Primary, Secondary World” links between Middle-earth and Wales. The language successfully combines fantasy mythological references to British Celtic legends and stories of its speakers, the Elves. And so, what Welsh legends would Tolkien have considered for *Lord of the Rings*?

Welsh History and *Mabinogion* Tales

Contemporary English literature did not appeal to Tolkien’s voracious philological appetite. Instead he devoured older, heroic legends with richly drawn linguistic styles like “Greek, and Celtic, and Romance, Germanic, Scandinavian ...” (*Letters* 144). In his eyes England lacked good mythology. In his letter to Milton Waldman, editor of Collins (now HarperCollins Publishing), Tolkien vents his early frustrations at not finding quality myths and fairy-stories in his country, often comparing his search to an insatiable hunger: “... and above all heroic legend on the brink of fairy-tale and history, of which there is far too little in the world (accessible to me)

for my appetite” (144). Little did he know language would become accessible to him as an undergraduate at Oxford, as Welsh study flourished at Jesus College with “Welsh connexions by foundation and tradition, the possessor [Jesus College] among other things of one of the treasures of Medieval Welsh: *The Red Book of Hergest*” (*Monsters* 189). Suddenly the world of Welsh language and literature became Tolkien’s metaphorical oyster.

According to Celtic scholar Patrick K. Ford, the *Red Book of Hergest* was written during the fourteenth century – around 1375 to 1425 – and fragments overlap in other ancient Welsh manuscripts like the *White Book of Rhydderch*, or *Llyfr Gwen Rhydderch*, too (2). For example, the Four Branches of the *Mabinogi* are found in these manuscripts. Initially, storytellers, the *cyfarwydd*, only recited stories but in the second half of the eleventh century they were written down by Christian priests “... in the insular Celtic languages, mainly Irish and Welsh” (Ellis 5). As a devoted researcher, Tolkien read with great interest these Welsh mythological narratives, and even designates his “‘source’ of Elf-lore the *Red Book of Westmarch*,” making a light scholarly joke and definite decisive nod towards its Welsh counterpart *The Red Book of Hergest* (Day 79).

As one of the greatest surviving pieces of British Celtic mythology and Welsh literature the *Mabinogion* “reflect[s] a collaboration between oral and literary culture, and give us an intriguing insight into the world of the traditional storyteller” (Davies ix). The *cyfarwydd* read legendary tales like the *Mabinogion* “to a listening audience” (Davies xxxi). Welsh poets, the *pencerdd*, sang for lords, ladies, or other wealthy noblemen. But lower ranking *cyfarwydd* held the greatest communal appeal as their “... stories were always accessible to ... listeners” (*Mabon and the Mysteries of Britain* 3). Tolkien is a master *cyfarwydd*, taking great delight amusing others with his stories. In his writing and literary group the infamous ‘Inklings,’ Tolkien

compared its members to “*practicing poets*” and read sections from his own work, like *The Hobbit* and other short stories, and ultimately also from *The Lord of the Rings* (*Letters* 36).

The legend of King Arthur was a personal favorite for Tolkien, and the *Mabinogion* offers a different point of view. It chronicles the early beginnings of Arthur as chieftain and his escapades with his band of warriors. Celtic scholar John Matthews argues “far more than the memory of a great and heroic leader was being recorded. More ancient memories were stirred to life by the deeds of the historical Arthur ...” (*Arthurian Tradition* 18). This is remarkably similar to Aragorn in *The Lord of the Rings*. He is not just a Ranger but also a man of Númenor, seeking to reclaim his ancestral kingship.

An uneasy tension lies between Celts and English in regards to their language and legends. English dominates and subjugates Celtic Arthurian legends (Burns 181). Lady Charlotte Guest, translator of the *Mabinogion*, claims that chivalry helped form the bond between “warriors of France, Spain, and Italy, with those of pure Teutonic descent” (*Mabinogion* 5). But this bond did not extend to the Celts, as they “did not want brotherhood with their conquerors” (Burns 181). For example, the English claim Arthur as one of their legends. However, Lady Charlotte Guest reminds readers that Celtic origins lie behind Arthurian tales, as his very name is also Welsh (Burns 181). These discrepancies help explain tension between Teutonic, Celtic ancestry. In his O’Donnell speech Tolkien argues, “between the speakers of British and English there was ... hostility (especially on the British side); and when men are hostile the language of their enemies may share their hatred” (*Monsters* 179). Tolkien was well aware that “Teutonic warriors supplanted the older, more sophisticatedly Celtic civilization and its fluid language and poetry” (Day 79).

Celtic scholars refer to *Mabinogion* for the first Four Branches in the collection of tales, as opposed to *Mabinogi* proper. *Mabinogion* is actually a misnomer first transcribed to English

from Welsh by Lady Charlotte Guest. Guest erroneously believed it to be the plural form of *Mabinogi*, “the suffix – (i)on is a very common plural ending in Welsh, and Lady Charlotte Guest assumed that *Mabinogion* was the correct form” (Ford 1). *Mabinogi* refers to only the first four stories – commonly called Branches – whereas the entire collection of eleven tales is *Mabinogion*. The collection of tales deals with “love and betrayal, shape-shifting and enchantment, conflict and retribution” and though they all share a common theme, they are not the work from a single author (Davies viiii). According to Ford, the misnomer *Mabinogion* ended up sticking despite being inaccurate because of its popularity and “scholars have not seen fit to correct the error” (Ford 1). The Welsh word *mab* means “son, boy,” and Ford argues one theory that “the tales had something to do with youth, either tales for boys”; perhaps the Four Branches “told of the birth, youth, marriage, and death of a single hero, Pryderi, and that Pryderi was virtually identically with the British god Maponos” (2-3). Thus these medieval Celtic tales remain with the Four Branches of the *Mabinogi* comprising: *Pwyll, Prince of Dyfed*; *Branwen Daughter of Llŷr*; *Manawydan Son of Llŷr*; and *Math Son of Mathonwy*. After these four tales, two shorter tales deal with internal strife and battles for independence within Britain: *The Dream of Macsen Wledig* and *The Adventure of Lludd and Llefelys*. Then, two tales dealing with Arthur and his band of warriors and their adventures: *Culwch and Olwen* and *The Dream of Rhonabwy*. Lastly, three French Arthurian romances complete the saga for eleven tales: *The Lady of the Fountain*, *Peredur son of Efwarg*, and *Gereint son of Erbin (Kings Beasts & Heroes 66)*. According to Celtic scholar Gwyn Jones, the complex interlinks within the *Mabinogion* make the collection “at once a book and a library” (66). Indeed, the *Mabinogion* deals with pre-Christian mythological Celtic gods and their adventures as “each branch consisted of episodes of related lore” (Ford 3-4). This explains the branch-tree imagery as they sufficiently relate back to one main narrative or ‘trunk,’ and are not completely independent tales.

Language and History Merging into Narrative Design

Despite enduring years of oppression, Wales manages to keep their mythology and stories alive by retaining their native language. Identity, culture and language are all linked, explains Tolkien: “No people in fact comes into being until it speaks a language of its own; let the languages perish and the peoples perish too” (*Monsters and Critics* 166). Indeed, the etymologies of English words are riddled with Celtic undertones: “... many ‘English’ surnames, ranging from the rarest to the most familiar, are linguistically derived from Welsh (or British), from place-names, patronymics, personal names, or nick-names, or are in part so derived, even when that origin is no longer obvious” (*Monsters* 167). As an example, Tolkien suggests the southeast region of Britain:

So, if these parts are now considered the most English, or the most Danish, they must have been the most Celtic, or British, or Belgic. There still endures the ancient pre-English, pre-Roman name of Kent. (*Monsters* 170)

In *Lord of the Rings* Treebeard maintains mythic historical origins and language when recalling the earlier ages of Middle-earth. The Elven realm of Lothlórien was named “*Taurelinlómëa-tumbalemorna Tumbaletaurëa Lómëanor*,” says Treebeard, but now the place, like the name, is simultaneously “fading, not growing,” transitioning to Laurelindórenan, then Lothlórien “Land of the Valley of Singing Gold, that was it, once upon a time ... Now it is the Dreamflower” (II: 467). As Tolkien’s “Primary World” truth, it is important to remember that English speech is the invasive language. Welsh, on the other hand, is native to Britain:

It may be shown only in uneasy jokes about Welsh spellings and place-names; it may be stirred by contacts no nearer than the names in Arthurian romance that echo faintly the Celtic patterns ... It is the native language to which in unexplored desire we would still go home. (*Monsters* 194)

Indeed, although life forever evolves, ancient history and memories remain deeply rooted within the soil. Language marks cultural progress in society. For example, habitual borrowing of words can show superiority of one culture over another: “people will often use foreign words when it

would have been perfectly possible to express their ideas by means of native speech-material” (Parry-Williams 43). Word borrowing, or replacing, is also in *Lord of the Ring*, which accounts for its cultural progress in social, economic and political aspects, as Middle-earth transitions more towards the human race at the end of the Third Age.

As discussed previously, tensions run high between Saxon and Celtic. These tensions may have been a reason for Tolkien not admitting Celtic influences in his epic. Tolkien’s philological advisor at Oxford, Joseph Wright, even advised him to “Go in for Celtic, lad; there’s money in it” (*Monsters* 163). Nonetheless, he found Celtic scholars too “critical and litigious” for his tastes (*Letters* 228-29). In fact, engaging with Celtic scholarship felt somewhat embarrassing for Teutonic professors. Despite any attraction, most did not readily admit their enjoyment towards it, as Tolkien points out:

I know many scholars, here and elsewhere, whose official field is in English and Germanic, who have drunk much more than I from this particular well of knowledge. But they often remain, as it were, secret drinkers. (*Monsters* 163)

There might have been a personal vendetta, too. Tolkien received multiple rejections for *The Silmarillion*, his lengthy novel explaining the history of Middle-earth. Edward Crankshaw, the publisher’s reader, thoroughly praised his prose narrative but also wrote he “disliked its ‘eye-splitting Celtic names.’ ... ‘It has something of that mad bright-eyed beauty that perplexes all Anglo-Saxons in the face of Celtic art’ ” (*Letters* 25). Tolkien responded aggressively:

Needless to say they are not Celtic! Neither are the tales. I do know Celtic things (many in their original languages Irish and Welsh), and feel for them a certain distaste: largely from their fundamental unreason. They have bright colour, but are like a broken stained glass window reassembled without design. They are in fact ‘mad’ as your reader says – but I don’t believe I am. (*Letters* 26)

Mad tale designs or disconnected Celtic patterns do not have the same beautifully constructed designs like Anglo-Saxon, Old Norse and Finnish. Tolkien considered the latter high fantasy and Celtic more emotional, instinctual fantasy (*Letters* 214). That is not to say they were poorly

written, but to Tolkien the Celts were more emotional, magical “being[s] full of dark and twilight, and laden with sorrow and regret” and he placed structure, logic before druid, magic (*Monsters* 172). According to Tolkien scholar Marjorie Burns, Tolkien fought hard to merge both sides into his narrative design, thus forming what would be his “Primary” and “Secondary” World designs: “Teutons as well as the Celts; he wanted their languages, their stories, and their places of origin, and he wanted it all to fit logically and believably within Middle-earth” (25). Indeed, in his letters he writes “I had a mind to make a body of more or less connected legend ... to the level of romantic fairy-story ... and fit for the more adult mind of a land long now steeped in poetry” (*Letters* 144-45).

Tolkien’s academic and personal politics with Celtic mythology aside, this did not deter him from addressing the O’Donnell audience. In a letter to Allen & Unwin, Tolkien writes how *Return of the King* must be published on their agreed upon date before the lecture saying, “I wish to tactfully allude to the book, since a part of what I wish to say is about ‘Celticness’ and in what that consists as a linguistic pattern” (*Letters* 227). Eventually he did retract his angry remarks about Crankshaw, too: “A publisher’s reader said they [the remote Elvish Legends] were too full of the kind of Celtic beauty that maddened Anglo-Saxons in a large dose. Very likely quite right” (*Letters* 215). It is an interesting duality that, despite fierce opposition and, at times, strong amounts of Celtic denial, his clear affinity towards the language and mythology proves it not to be the case.

Conclusions

Based on the aforementioned evidence, Tolkien’s initial assertions that he did have inspiration from Welsh lore are baseless. It did find its way into *The Lord of the Rings*. The *Mabinogion* story “Culhwch and Olwen” is the earliest known Arthurian romance in Welsh and

discusses the native, non-romanticized Arthur (Ford 119). A good deal of the story is about the Welsh chieftain and his devoted followers, similar to Aragorn and his devoted followers of Rangers, and the loyal Legolas and Gimli. Magical rings and ‘swords’ are prevalent in Welsh mythology. According to Tolkien scholar David Day, three Welsh stories could have inspired Tolkien’s ‘One Ring’ creation when he began early drafts:

The damsel Luned, the Lady of the Fountain, gives a Ring of Invisibility to the hero Owain. Dame Lyonesse gives her hero Gareth a magical ring that will not allow him to be wounded. And Percival Long Spear goes on a quest for a gold ring during which he slays the Black Serpent of the Barrows and wins a stone of invisibility and a gold-making stone. (Day 79)

Today, Tolkien scholars view Celtic mythological influences a bit more seriously than in previous years. Leslie Ellen Jones writes in her preface that she has “... taken the liberty of giving slightly more emphasis to Tolkien’s Celtic inspirations both because they are often overlooked and, as a Celticist myself, I find them particularly interesting” (12). Burns discusses Tolkien’s Celtic knowledge at length, especially his knowledge about *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, saying, “... Tolkien worked – and worked by choice – with Celtic and Arthurian texts ... He was also well aware of Gawain’s Celtic roots, of how the tale uses elements from ‘older fairy story’ and how the ‘adventures derive ultimately from Celtic legend’” (21). In *Tolkien, Race, and Cultural History From Fairies to Hobbits*, Tolkien scholar Dimitra Fimi argues that Tolkien was determined to have Elvish language, and therefore Welsh, be the cornerstone in his epic: “He specifically declared that his view on the beauty of the Welsh language are a matter of personal taste and that not everyone will agree” (80). Tolkien himself argued that English philologists who chose to ignore Welsh language were consequently “lack[ing] ... experience necessary to their business” as it is needed to understand the growth of the British language (*Monsters and Critics* 163). It is clear Tolkien was greatly influenced by Welsh, so it is perplexing that Welsh links have not been researched seriously until recent years. In the remaining chapters I aim to prove

that Welsh language, history and mythology, Tolkien's "Primary World" truths, did influence Tolkien in his "Secondary World" mythology.

Chapter 3

CELTIC ELVES AND THE OTHERWORLD

Celtic Otherworld and Tolkien

Tolkien's connection to Welsh is most apparent through language – Sindarin. But what about those fluent in Sindarin, how are they connected? The Elves and their realms link Welsh mythology and Middle-earth. Elvish forest realms compare to Celtic Otherworld landscapes, *Annwn* or *Annwfn* in the *Mabinogion*, as a mysterious area that lay between Middle-earth and the unknown. In Celtic mythology “only those intent upon adventure would be willing go” and it is not until Frodo's willingness to seek adventure does he actually arrive at these places (*Arthurian Tradition* 35). The ancient, elven realms Rivendell and Lothlórien, home to Elrond and Galadriel respectively, are surrounded by lush, green foliage. When Frodo first observes the natural beauty in Lothlórien he notes its lack of decay or sickness on anything that grew upon the earth. These mysteriously preserved havens are a place of solitude, reflection and rejuvenation. While there, the Fellowship revitalizes in mind and spirit. These lands and its occupants are Tolkien's “Primary World” reflection where Welsh language, mythology provide Middle-earth's spiritual soul.

The Otherworld presents reads with a peculiar, paradoxical space: it exists in reality and can be crossed, but more often it is a spiritual journey outside of time. Even its name, Otherworld, distinguishes it as a separate entity from the normal physical world. Boundary markers of doors, mist, and woods, even hilltops hide Otherworld lands. Burns argues the Celts conceived an Otherworld to “house their otherworld beings; they conceived instead a spirit world shared and magically juxtaposed with the primary, everyday world” (53). So being part of the Otherworld chronological time – life through death – blurs and intersects as “the past maintains a presence and the future is not fully obscured” (Burns 70). While I do agree with Burns, I propose the

Otherworld, particularly how it is described within Elven realms, is more than just spatial time and space. Symbolically the Otherworld is one's psychological adventure or inner-journey of reflection, relying on sixth sense. Perception and awareness are vivid and clear. In *Hero of a Thousand Faces* comparative mythology scholar Joseph Campbell argues two worlds, divine and human, may appear as two separate entities "different as life and death" but in actuality "the two kingdoms are actually one. The realm of the gods is a forgotten dimension of the world we already know" (217). This is Celtic ideology about the Otherworld. For example, two Welsh deities in the *Mabinogion*, Branwen and Rhiannon, are tangible beings living in Wales. They are not in remote civilizations, or on impenetrable mountain tops. Welsh mythological deities, like Tolkien's Elves, are closer to being human than actual gods. Ellis echoes this argument saying "deities in Celt myth tend to be the ancestors of the people rather than their creators ... their intellectual attributes have to equal their physical capabilities" (21). This is remarkably similar to Tolkien's Elves, as they are the first-born creatures in Middle-earth. So these magical realms are actually places we know in residual, ancient memory – which aligns itself to Tolkien's "Primary World" perception of truth in Middle-earth. The Otherworld lands are where individuals reflect, question, and begin a rite of passage.

So how does one cross over? Are occupants consciously aware of the shift in consciousness? One standard device to signal passage is the medieval Celtic tradition involving the "chase or the hunt" (Ford 35). In Arthurian legend, a "white doe or white stag often appeared to lead knights to adventure deep within the forest" (*Arthurian Tradition* 16). This happens in the First Branch in the *Mabinogi* when a human, Pwyll, crosses unknowingly into the Otherworld while venturing into the forest on a stag hunt. In the forest he is separated from his hunting party and encounters a pack of hunting dogs feasting on a stag. Without bothering to look at the stag, Pwyll sees strange, bright colors of the hunting dogs noting "he had never seen dogs of this

colour – they were gleaming shining white, and their ears were red” (Davis 4). The abnormal display of colors on his hounds indicates Pwyll is no longer in the normal world; red and white are explicitly known in the *Mabinogion* as the “colors of animals of the Otherworld” (Ford 35). Pwyll helps Arawn, king of *Annwn* and a Celtic God, and becomes his human champion; meanwhile, on a personal level, increases his ruling power upon his return to the normal world as Prince of Dyfed in Wales. He returns one year later with additional experience and a different worldly perspective. As the Otherworld king’s champion, his rule with his own kingdom changes so significantly that he changes his name to Pwyll *Pen Annwn* (Pwyll, Head of the Otherworld) (Ford 42).

Frodo’s chase by three Nazgul Riders leads him to cross through forest and water, liminal boundary markers into the Otherworld. The three Riders spy upon them on the outskirts of Rivendell, which shifts into an unseen pursuit “a rushing noise as if a wind were rising and pouring through the branches of the pines” and the light became stifled by “the dark shadow of tall pine-trees” (I:212). Frodo and his companions exit the safe, normal world and prepare to venture into the Otherworld. Finally, as if appearing out of thin air, the Riders appear “out of the gate in the trees that they had just left rode a Black Rider” (I: 213). The pursuit turns into a deadly hunt, as the enemy tries to run down Frodo and bar his crossing across the Ford leading into Rivendell “two rode towards Frodo; two galloped madly towards the Ford to cut off his escape. They seemed to him to run like the wind and to grow swiftly larger and darker, as their courses converged with his” (I: 213). When the water barrier is crossed there came a “roaring and rushing: a noise of loud water rolling down many stones,” and eventually “white riders upon white horses with frothing manes” buried the black Riders, with Frodo safely entering Rivendell (I: 214). His reward for the perilous crossing is meeting with Elrond, along with temporary peace from outside threats.

In both the First Branch of the *Mabinogi*, and this particular scene in Middle-earth, there is a chase or hunt into the unknown. Occupants are surrounded by magic, and though the forest contained many terrors, it also contained many wonders. According to Celtic scholar John Matthews, the forest symbolizes an “untamed world, where almost anything could, and did, lie in wait for the unwary. It stood, also, for a certain state of mind, a place to be reached on the long road from birth to death ...” (*Arthurian Tradition* 35). The interplay of dark, bright light through the trees and border markers of water firmly establishes the idea of birth of a new consciousness, or spiritual awareness. The crossing over from known world to unknown territory is shifting into an Otherworld narrative and setting the scene for something much bigger in both examples.

Otherworld and British Celtic Language

So now we have an idea of what happens on the outskirts, but what changes when inside the nourishing sanctuary? Maybe the word “nourishing” for the Otherworld is a bit deceiving. Though it can be a place of nourishment for those seeking initiation and enlightenment, relieving weariness from the corporeal body, but “nourishing” also implies living growth. However the Otherworld exists outside of chronological time; in fact, time is continuously cross-intersecting. There is no physical growth, similar to religious beliefs about a state of limbo. Much of the Celtic terminology associated with death (being buried underground, darkness or twilight, and moving down) is because of growth stagnation within Elvish lands. Reflections of death occur, but more likely it deals with spiritual awakening or new consciousness, rather than end-all-be-all physical death. The Welsh word for Otherworld *Annwn*, roughly translates to “Hades, Hell” or the “Lower regions” (Guest 14, 289). Celtic scholars Alywn and Brinley Rees translate it to “Great World” or “Non-world” or “Underworld” (42). But unlike Christianity’s version of Hell, these are not places of purgatory and torment but “an abode of Otherworldly dignity” (*Mabon* 23). Dignity is a strange

word to use for Hell. Instead of Christian damnation it links the Otherworld to a place of virtue, respect, or even Enlightenment. The language is entirely void of Christianity's version towards atoning for one's earthly sins. Instead, the Otherworld is a "mythological reality or symbolic continuum within which we can encounter the archetypal energies ..." (*Mabon* 11). So the implied language is harnessing ancient, dormant energy towards spiritual awakening and not physical death. When the Fellowship arrives in Rivendell, Tolkien draws these Celtic energies, saying their meeting with Elves is not "a scene of *action* but of *reflection*" (*Letters* 153). It is no wonder, then, Elrond symbolizes ancient wisdom as "his House represents Lore – the preservation in reverent memory ..." (153).

In a similar vein, Lothlórien, Galadriel's realm, is a place for truthful reflection and remembrance. Frodo found his "hearing and other senses sharpened" after he "stepped over a bridge of time into a corner of the Elder Days" (II: 349). Once again, we have indications of border markers from one land into another as, quite literally, bridging from normal to unknown. These indicate "shifts in perception, attitude, or place are likely to occur" (Burns 50). Almost immediately, time-shifting occurs when the Fellowship visits Cerin Amroth, an ancient burial mound. Unlike Barrow-Wights mounds in Middle-earth, which are hostile "hungering versions of death draw[ing] the hobbits into its dark cold confines," this mound serves as a gateway towards ancient, peaceful rest (Burns 69). In Cerin Amroth, coincidentally located in the heart of Lothlórien, Sam remarks he feels "*inside* a song" because of the unusual sensations vibrating through his body (II: 351). Frodo felt as if he "stepped through a high window that looked on a vanished world" as the company looked upon the great mound with its two circling crowns of trees that contained "the heart of the ancient realm as it was long ago" (II: 350). Clearly, there is a reemergence of ancient, archetypal energies. Frodo felt "he was in a timeless land that did not

fade or change or fall into forgetfulness” (II: 350). The Otherworld remains just as it has always been. Despite being beautiful, there is also a shared sadness with its stagnation.

Melancholy, sadness and past remembrance are all shared by Elves. Again, they are closer in connection to humans than Gods, but spiritually attuned to Middle-earth better than anyone. This has a way of rubbing off on those open to their different state of consciousness. Frodo hears the “far off” sound of “great sea upon beaches that had long ago been washed away and sea-birds crying whose race had perished from the earth” (II: 351). The fact that he experiences those who have lived before, a completely new awakening, he himself temporarily enters the past while still maintaining a sense of the present. Later when Aragorn decides to leave the mound, he “takes Frodo’s hand in his, [as] he left the hill of Cerin Amroth and came there never again as a living man” which is implying he will perchance come again, but only when his time has eventually passed from the land of living into death (II: 352). By engaging in ethereality and shiftings of time Tolkien plays with British Celtic language and gets back to a “Primary World” reflection of truth. Indeed, this particular scene inside Cerin Amroth contains Tolkien’s “heart” of his epic (*Letters* 221).

British Celtic History and Powerful Female Deities

It is abundantly fairly clear that British Celtic, Welsh, is Tolkien’s inspiration for the colloquial Elvish tongue Sindarin. Elves are the indigenous first-born creations of Middle-earth, not man. Like ancestral tribes, the Elves “live with nature and augment nature far more than they devise or construct, and in this once again emulate the Celts (of the Celts as they are popularly seen)” (Burns 66). Also, the physical appearance of Elves and Celts are quite similar. Squire describes the Celts as “tall, fair, light-haired, blue- or gray-eyed, broad-headed people” (21). Likewise, Tolkien’s Elves are not small pixies of diminutive size and stature but graceful, tall,

and supernatural looking, who closely resemble the “pre-human Irish race of immortals called the Tuatha De Danann” (Day 80). The Tuatha tribes are taller and stronger than mortals; love song, poetry and music; and “possess talismans, jewels and weapons that humans might consider magical in their powers” (Day 80). Though the Tuatha are based on Gaelic mythology, they actually parallel Children of Don; Don being a goddess in Welsh mythology (Rees and Rees 69). In fact, Welsh mythology is predominantly matriarchic. According to Rees and Rees, the supernatural world in Wales carries a feminine quality to it, “Women are far more prominent than men in medieval accounts of the magic mound-dwellings and of the islands of immortality which lie beyond the sea” (40).

Rhiannon is one such woman associated with magic in the *Mabinogion*. In the First Branch of the *Mabinogi* on the Mound of Arberth, Pwyll spies his future Otherworld wife, the noble woman Rhiannon riding atop her white horse. No matter how long Pwyll pursues Rhiannon he cannot catch her. Finally, after countless hours, he asks her to stop, and she does, implying he cannot take her by force and that she wants shared sovereignty. Some legends have Rhiannon as a horse goddess figuratively and literally. Celtic scholars have thought that her name “may have meant ‘Great Queen’ as she is repeatedly associated with horses” (Rees and Rees 45). In the original story she later takes a white mare form and is called “Mare-Goddess” or “Muse-Goddess” (Graves 385). Rhiannon possesses natural power. Her birds’ songs can heal the wounded, wake the dead and lull the living to sleep of death (Ford 70-72). In the *Welsh Triads*, which were used as mnemonic training devices for Welsh bards, it states:

There are three things which are not often heard: the songs of the bird of Rhiannon, a song of wisdom from the mouth of a Saxon, and an invitation to a feast from a miser. (Squire 273)

In the Second Branch of the *Mabinogi*, her enchanted birds lull Bran and his company into losing track of time while feasting at a magical hill in Harlech, – seven years, than another eighty (Ford

71). While under her spell they have no painful memories of war: “all the grief they had witnessed and experienced, they had no memory of it or of any sorrow in the world” (71-72).

No question *Lord of the Rings* revolves strongly around men, however, Galadriel is arguably the strongest female character. Galadriel has the same effect as Rhiannon on men, with allure and natural magic. She is a beautiful Otherworldly elf-woman, “no less tall than the Lord ... clad wholly in white ... no sign of age was upon them, unless in the depths of their eyes; for those were keen as lances in the starlight, and yet profound, the wells of deep memory” (II: 354). Her voice is “musical, but deeper than a women’s” (II: 357). It is soothing and comforting, lulling the Fellowship to peace after their long ordeal through Moria, similar to Rhiannon’s mystical birds, “Do not let your hearts be troubled, she said. ‘Tonight you shall sleep in peace.’ Then they sighed and felt suddenly weary, as though who have been questioned long and deeply, though no words had been spoken openly” (357). Galadriel is both water goddess and Earth mother. To reach Lothlórien, the Company enters through “woods where the Silverlode flows into the Great River” and, upon entering, Legolas feels compelled to wash, “I will bathe my feet, for it is said that the water is healing to the weary” (II: 334-35, 339). The watery element of Lothlórien is rejuvenating to the Fellowship. Indeed, even Frodo “felt that the strain of travel and all weariness was washed from his limbs” as he soaked his feet before entering (339). Somewhat unconsciously, they are ceremoniously cleansing themselves before meeting the Otherworld Goddess.

Galadriel’s mirror is a reflection of her natural power and art. Clothed all in white, Galadriel leads Sam and Frodo away from the rest of the Fellowship deeper into the woods “tall and white and fair she walked beneath the trees. She spoke no word, but beckoned to them” (II: 361). They oblige her beckoning and follow to the bottom of a green hollow, in which:

[a] silver stream that issued from the fountain on the hill. At the bottom, upon a low pedestal carved like a branching tree, stood a basin of silver, wide and shallow, and beside it stood a silver ewer. (I: 361)

In this special place, Frodo and Sam glimpse into her mirror with mind and heart. According to Joseph Campbell, a silver mirror is significant in mythology because it is “reflecting the goddess and drawing her forth from the august repose of her divine nonmanifestation, [and] is symbolic of the world, the field of the reflected vision ... the act of manifestation or ‘creation’” (*Hero of a Thousand Faces* 213). Her mirror uses Elf magic, natural magic, not implying any false spells. Since Lothlórien and Rivendell are Otherworld domains, their energy (or art) assists spiritual awakening or consciousness. Her truth feels like magic. Galadriel advises Frodo and Sam the mirror will “show things unbidden, and those are often stranger and more profitable than things which we wish to behold” (II: 362). And so, the mirror is extensions of her art, helping others find clarity, vision, in their spiritual quests. She remarks that the mirror reflects “things that were, and things that are, and things that yet may be” (376-7). Like native Welsh, the Elves use Celtic magic, an ingredient in Tolkien’s “Primary World” truth:

faeries is too lavish, and fantastical, incoherent and repetitive. For another and more important thing: it is involved in, and explicitly contains the Christian religion. In other words, myth and fairy-story must, as all art, reflect and contain in solution elements of moral and religious truth (or error) but not explicit, not in the known form of the primary ‘real’ world. (*Letters* 144)

Her mirror contains just enough “Primary World” elements to feel decisively Celtic. Sam remarks that Galadriel “seemed to be looking inside of me and asking me what I would do if she gave me the chance of flying back home to the Shire to a nice little hole – with a bit of garden of my own” (II: 358). Frodo experiences something different through the reflection. Unlike Sam’s visions, Frodo sees the Dark Lord Sauron, a vision of Gandalf and also the great expansive Sea. The great Eye of Sauron “rimmed with fire ... yellow as a cat’s watchful and intent” bent towards the One Ring around Frodo’s neck (II: 364). Galadriel simultaneously sees these reflections with Frodo,

telling him “I know what it was that you saw ... for that is also in my mind” (I: 364). This link between the both of them shows that Frodo achieves a higher state of consciousness. Frodo experiences the unknown, and foresees the trials before him. As Ringbearer, and one that has seen the Great Eye, he can now see with a “keen eye” all “that which is hidden” implying he sees truth on levels others may not ever notice (365-66). Galadriel and her mirror awoke Frodo’s spiritual awareness. This in time comes back to haunt him, as he will eventually feel the passage of time, more so than other hobbits.

Galadriel blesses the Fellowship with gifts of Elven clothing and weaponry. Coincidentally, faeries in Welsh mythology are known as “‘Mothers’ or ‘The Mothers’ Blessing’” and certainly Galadriel is mother to them all in age and wisdom (Rees and Rees 40-41). Galadriel and her handmaidens make the clothing “under the twilight of Lorien” with careful thought and love (II: 370). Pippin questions if they are magic, to which the leader replies, “I do not know what you mean by that’ ... They are Elvish robes certainly, if that is what you mean” (II: 370). Elvish skills are so highly evolved, surpassing human perfection that their craft looks like magic. As previously stated, “their ‘magic’ is Art, delivered from many of its human limitations: more effortless, more quick, more complete (produce, and vision is unflawed correspondence)” (*Letters* 146).

As the Fellowship leaves Lothlórien, Galadriel sails next to the Fellowship in a large swan boat, “Its beak shone like burnished gold, and its eyes glinted like a jet set in yellow stones; its huge white wings were half lifted” as they pass through the edge of the forest, along the river, and out of the Otherworld (II: 372). The reflection of swans is not coincidental. Along with their graceful beauty, swans can represent supernatural connotations. According to Rees and Rees:

The implication is rather that the form of a swan – perhaps because it is that of a creature of land, water and air, a creature whose milieu has no boundaries – its appropriate for communication *between* two worlds, and that, at the time of the hero’s conception, the

mother as well as the supernatural father is in that transitional zone, neither completely in this world nor in the other. (236)

This reinforces Lothlórien's Otherworld origins, as Galadriel's assists them crossing between both worlds. Frodo says Galadriel appears "present and yet remote, a living vision of that which has already been left far behind by the flowing streams of Time" (II: 373). Like Pwyll returning to Dyfed, the Fellowship exits Lothlórien with spiritual assistance, guidance and tools. However unlike Pwyll, the return from Otherworld to normal world is not a happy transition. They leave with uneasy sadness, and venture "southwards" in which there is "no breeze" and "no voice of bird broke the silence" as "dusk came early, followed by a grey and starless night" (II: 379). There is a sense of foreboding as they leave and return on their quest.

Language and History Merging into Narrative Design

Tolkien invokes Celtic-like language like "night-time, dusk, and the subdued colours silver and grey" while discussing Elves so we are aware of the entrance into another world (Burns 66). Indeed, magic is strongest at boundaries and thresholds. A lot of Celtic imagery centers on twilight, dusk, dawn, mounds, the outskirts of the forest and hilltops. Burns explains that the "sense of openness is itself consistent with those Celtic tales ... What is important is the threshold itself; once the traveler has moved beyond the passageway, with its magical, in-between power" (67). Burial mounds are known for their in-between power, as they are sacred markers for ending of life and beginning of death. So it comes as no surprise that the heart of his epic, Tolkien's "Primary World" truth, happens on Cerin Amroth. Likewise in the First Branch of the *Mabinogi*, Pwyll's second spiritual encounter happens atop Gorsedd Arberth, the Mound of Arberth (Davies 8). One member from Pwyll's court tells him:

'The strange thing about the mound is that whatever nobleman sits on it will not leave there without one of two things happening: either he will be wounded or injured, or else he will see something wonderful.' (Davies 8)

Atop the mounds, Pwyll and Frodo seek unknown outcomes, both looking to possess more spiritual growth towards achieving their goals. Frodo achieves spiritual guidance after testing himself with Galadriel's mirror. Entering the dangers of the Otherworld, knowing the possibility of injury, tests Pwyll perseverance. He crosses the deep forest realm and sits upon the Mound of Arberth. His reward is Rhiannon, who provides guidance and assistance for defeating his enemy Gwawl, son of Clud (*Mabon* 23). The mounds serve as a gateway between worlds – life and death – and Arberth translates to “Sovereignty's Chair – an inaugural mound where kings are installed (*Mabon* 26). Pwyll's adventure and desire for knowledge and power, led him to Rhiannon, who is sovereign over the land. With his new bride, Pwyll's ordinary life assimilates Otherworld elements rapidly.

Tolkien wanted Elves to speak a language modeled after the “Primary World” in his “Secondary World,” Middle-earth. In *English and Welsh* he tells an interesting story that Welsh might have been the celestial language spoken in Heaven (*Monsters* 164). The tale is both humorous as it is political. St. Peter, says Tolkien, is instructed to find why the language of Heaven has changed. So going outside the Gates and he cried “*caws bobî*, and slammed the Gates before the Welshmen, who had surged out, discovered that this was a trap without cheese” (164). Though a bit tongue-in-cheek, Welsh is discovered to be the language of Heaven. However the story dates back to the late 1500s, when the English government was bent on eradicating Welsh from Wales and, if need be, Heaven (164). But Tolkien tactfully alludes that “Welsh still survives on earth, and so possible elsewhere also ...” (164). As a “Primary World” reflection, it makes sense that Sindarin, regarded as the noblest language in Middle-earth, might have connections to a language spoken in Heaven.

Time passes differently in the Otherworld realms, and Elvish magic have a hand in delaying death. Indeed, Galadriel's and Elrond's powerful rings slow the natural passage of time.

Their “chief power (of all the rings alike) was the prevention or slowing of *decay* (i.e. ‘change’ [was] viewed as a regrettable thing), the preservation of what is desired or loved, or its semblance” (*Letters* 152). This is why their realms emanate a mysterious, non-life like, Otherworld beauty. As an Elvish motive, Elrond says “those who made them [three Elvish rings] did not desire strength or domination or hoarded wealth, but understanding, making, and healing, to preserve all things unstained” (II: 268). Elves will not die from old age; however, their corporeal bodies can be slain. But, unlike men, their souls remain in Middle-earth for all time. Despite their gifts, their immortality is also their doom (*Letters* 246). This unnaturally long life is why Elves are primarily concerned with burdens and grief caused by deathlessness in time and change, rather than with actual death itself (*Letters* 146). This serves as a warning for those entering Otherworld realms and not wanting to return. Bilbo says to Frodo that he “can’t count days in Rivendell” but feels as though it has been “quite long” since arriving (II: 273). When the Fellowship passes into the immortal world it is easy for them to mistake “hours for years, or years for hours” (Day 81). Likewise, in the Second Branch of the *Mabinogi* the company travels into the Otherworld and “spent eighty years so that they were not aware of ever having spent a more pleasurable or more delightful time ... nor could anyone tell by looking at the other that he had aged in that time” (Davies 33-34).

Conclusions

Elvish lands are “Primary World” reflections. By implementing Welsh language and mythology this fulfills Tolkien’s desire to create a spiritual heart within his “Secondary World.” He skillfully crafts British Celtic language and Otherworldly designs, which are prevalent in the *Mabinogion*. By assisting Frodo and Sam, Galadriel fulfills a strong matriarchal role that is prominent in Welsh mythology, guiding Frodo to his spiritual awakening. Indeed, without her influence, the quest may well have failed. Frodo receives a crystal phial with Eärendil’s, the Elves

most beloved star, starlight caught by the waters of Galadriel's fountain (II: 376). Sam receives the most important gift of all; he is given a box full of dust and a small silver nut from Galadriel's garden:

if you keep it and see your home again at last, then perhaps it may reward you. Though you should find all barren and laid waste, there will be few gardens in Middle-earth that will bloom like your garden, if you sprinkle this earth there. (II: 375)

During the quest, this gift appeared less important than swords and armor. However, it supports Tolkien's view of spirituality in nature, as Joseph Campbell argues: "If the hero in his triumph wins the blessing of the goddess or the god and is then explicitly commissioned to return to the world with some elixir for the restoration of society, the final stage of his adventure is supported by all the powers of his supernatural patron" (*The Hero with a Thousand Faces* 196-7). When the hobbits return to the Shire they are shocked that it is completely obliterated by machines and metal and overrun by gangs. Once peace is restored, it is time to restore the balance of nature, too. It is the gift of the Goddess, Galadriel's Otherworldly gift, which revives the Shire:

So Sam planted saplings in all the places where specially beautiful or beloved trees had been destroyed, and he put a grain of the previous dust in the soil at the root of each ... at the end he found that he still had a little of the dust left; so he went to the Three-Farthing Stone, which is as near the centre of the Shire as no matter, and cast it in the air with his blessing. (III: 1023)

Sure enough, the following spring bloomed, sprouted and prospered like never before, "as if time was in a hurry and wished to make one year do for twenty" (III: 1023). With Sam's blessing of fertility, the Shire grows into a miniscule version of Lothlórien's garden. However unlike the Elven realm, the Shire is nourishing in every sense of the word, and remains a place of life, decay, and death.

Chapter 4

BATTLE OF THE TREES: ANCIENT ARCHETYPES

Ents are memorable, fascinating characters in *The Lord of the Rings*. Tolkien says that “Ents are composed of philology, literature and life. They owe their name to the *eald enta georc* of Anglo-Saxon, and their connexion with stone” (*Letters* 212). Although their name derives from Old English, the famous march of the Ents – the tree warriors who storm Isengard, Saruman’s citadel – is loosely based on an old Welsh poem *Cad Goddeu*, “The Battle of the Trees” by Taliesin (Jones 64). The Ents remain deep inside Fangorn Forest, an Otherworld location, which Tolkien describes as “dark ... night seemed to have taken refuge under its great trees, creeping away from the coming Dawn” (II: 459). As ancient Otherworldly protectors in Fangorn Forest, they tend to all living trees. There is also another being, Tom Bombadil, who like Treebeard is an Otherworld guardian. Along with being Otherworldly protectors, both Tom and Treebeard are record keepers. Indeed, both arrange creatures by their genealogical roots, in song or verse, historically placing them in Middle-earth’s vast archives. As guardians, they maintain ancient histories, languages, and protect Middle-earth’s landscapes. In this chapter, I will discuss how Tolkien connects “Primary World” ingredients, Welsh history and language, through Tom and Treebeard, and Otherworld landscapes in which they live.

Treebeard – Otherworld Guardian

According to Celtic scholar Caitlin Matthews, Treebeard is an archetype similar to the Wild Herdsman in Welsh mythology because of his “guardianship of deep native memory” (*Mabon of the Mysteries of Britain* 141). Matthews describes the Wild Herdsman as “rough and primitive in appearance,” whose purpose is to help others through their “initiation within the Otherworld” (138). The Wild Herdsman can appear dangerous or hostile, and indeed, Treebeard is initially

hostile to Merry and Pippin saying: “I almost feel that I dislike you both” (II: 463). But in actuality, this is an Otherworld trick to challenge initiates at their “deepest levels” of spiritual consciousness (*Mabon* 141). In Tolkien’s early conceptual drafts of *Lord of the Rings*, he writes Treebeard as “a hostile and threatening character” (Jones 67). However this soon changes; he is not hostile, but a magnanimous champion of the natural world saying: “we [Ents] are made of the bones of the earth. We can split stones like the roots of trees, only quicker, far quicker if our minds are roused!” (II: 486). In his Otherworld sanctuary, nature is communal for Treebeard. Like a religious icon, some days in the forest he “spends ... breathing” and other days “walks and sings all day and hears no more than the echo of my own voice in the hollow hills” (II: 469). Fangorn Forest, in name and place, is his everlasting life, “*Fangorn* is my name, according to some, *Treebeard* others make it. *Treebeard* will do” (II: 464). Campbell remarks that Everlasting beings are in complete harmony with their natural, surrounding world:

Those that know, not only that the Everlasting lives in them, but that what they, and all things, really are *is* the Everlasting, dwell in the groves of the wish-fulfilling trees, drink the brew of immortality, and listen everywhere to the unheard music of eternal concord. (*Hero of a Thousand Faces* 167)

As evidenced in Chapter Three, Celtic guardians challenge spiritual growth as a rite of passage for Otherworld seekers. At the beginning of *Lord of the Rings*, Merry and Pippin are relatively naïve characters. However, while in Fangorn Forest both mature through the help of their mentor. After their first meeting, Pippin described Treebeard as an “enormous well ... filled up with ages of memory and long, slow, steady thinking” whose penetrating eyes considered both hobbits with “the same slow care that it had given its own inside affairs for endless years” (II: 463).

Tom Bombadil – Otherworld Guardian

As a Celtic archetype, Tom Bombadil is Middle-earth’s most ancient guardian living in the Old Forest. As Tolkien’s “Primary World” truth, that is, British language and history in

Middle-earth, he is an Otherworld guardian of memory, a living library. His name reveals a bit of his nature, too. Elrond calls him “Iarwain Ben-Adar” which in Elvish means “old” or “fatherless” (Jones 48). Jones argues that Tom’s Sindarian name is quite significant because of its Welsh connections:

Welsh sounding name ... (in Tolkien’s lecture “English and Welsh” *adar* is the first word he mentions in his long list of “pleasurable” Welsh words); and *pen* (whose initial consonant in certain grammatical circumstances is softened to *b*) means ‘head.’ (48)

Tom’s memory runs deep, and his obsessive zeal for exasperating stories astounds, and frightens, the hobbits. Tom begins his tirade of stories first about nature, at times half-speaking to himself:

His voice would turn to song, and he would get out of his chair and dance about. He told them tales of bees and flowers, the ways of trees, and the strange creatures in the forest, about evil things and good things, things friendly and things unfriendly, cruel things and kind things, and secrets hidden under brambles. (I: 129)

His stories grow more serious about hidden dangers in Middle-earth. At this point, Tom is instructing the hobbits, so their quest will not fail. Tom explains the mystery of the Great Willow, a dangerous tree in the Old Forest, and his power “his heart was rotten ... he was cunning and a master of winds ... thirsty spirit drew power out of the earth and spread like fine root-threads in the ground ...” (I: 130). After he finishes, the hobbits ask in fear and wonder who he is. Tom simply replies he is “Eldest, that’s what I am; Tom was here before the river and the trees; Tom remembers the first raindrop and the first acorn” (I: 131). Like Treebeard, Tom is a guardian and instructor of great wisdom, and he “knew the dark under the stars when it was fearless – before the Dark Lord came from Outside” (I: 131). When the hobbits politely ask his wife Goldberry what Tom is, and she replies: ““Tom Bombadil is the Master ... He has no fear. Tom Bombadil is master”” (I: 124). They are completely baffled by her response.

Tom and Goldberry are natural magic, an unknown mystery. In one of his letters, Tolkien explains that “Tom Bombadil [is] the spirit of the (vanishing) Oxford and Berkshire countryside” (*Letters* 26). As an example of Tolkien’s “Primary World” truth, they are ancestral energy in the

Otherworld. As previously stated in Chapter Three, the Otherworld is a “mythological reality or symbolic continuum within which we can encounter the archetypal energies ...” (*Mabon* 11). This cosmic couple has no beginning and no end; they are ancient, dormant energy. Jones argues they are “the archetype on a more abstract level” a classic model for the divine couple in Celtic mythology (55). As Otherworld instructors, like Wild Herdsmen, they help seekers, or in this case the hobbits, “roots out bad habits and mental apathy which obstruct the path of progress” (*Mabon* 141). Indeed under the couple’s care, the hobbits are given plentiful food and refreshing water to drink, no longer fearing the Old Forest. The hobbits “became suddenly aware that they were singing merrily, as if it was easier and more natural than talking” (I: 125). Caitlin Matthews argues that Tom is an Adamic man, “one of the first created beings who holds all beasts in his stewardship. He is guardian of the totems and the repository of memory” (*Mabon* 141). His instructions reveal spiritual mysteries within Middle-earth, furthering their knowledge in the world. With his intoxicating stories, the hobbits feel they wandered into “strange regions beyond their memory ... singing out into ancient starlight, when only the Elf-sires were awake” (I: 131). They felt “enchanted ... under the spell of his words” (131).

British Celtic Language

Treebeard is infatuated with proper place names and their historical significance. He compares language to music, saying “songs like trees bear fruit only in their own time and their own way” (II: 486). Ent-speech is a living, lyrical language. Nothing is forgotten; history, language, names are all interwoven together. His collective memory evolves deeper and deeper, like a tree growing deeper roots and twisty vines. In Fangorn Forest, he explains to his young students, Merry and Pippin, how the Entish language is forever growing in tune with history in Middle-earth:

For one thing it would take a long while: my name is growing all the time, and I've lived a very long, long time; so *my* name is like a story. Real names tell you the story of the things they belong to in my language, in the Old Entish, as you might say. It is a lovely language, but it takes a very long time to say anything in it, because we do not say anything in it, unless it is worth taking a long time to say, and to listen to (II: 465).

Because of his loyalty for maintaining language and history Treebeard is resistant to change.

Change means forgetting, and Treebeard wants to protect names and history for all eternity.

When Merry and Pippin say 'hill' in Common Tongue, a new word for Treebeard, he is unimpressed with their explanation saying "it is a hasty word for a thing that has stood here ever since this part of the world was shaped" (II: 466). Treebeard further laments that "hasty words" decimate beautiful, flowing language. For example, the Elven realm of *Laurelindórenan* is now Lothlórien, and these realms are "fading, not growing. Land of the Valley of Singing Gold ... now it is the Dreamflower" (II: 467). Later, Treebeard lists all the names of Living Creatures within his ancient memory – elves, dwarves, man, beaver – but grows agitated when he cannot find an appropriate place for the hobbits saying "you do not seem to fit in anywhere!" (II: 464). Merry and Pippin suggest a new line "*Half-grown hobbits, the hole-dwellers*" and offer to be put "next to Man (the Big People)" (II: 465). Like a shepherd tending to his flock, Treebeard finds comfort in finding appropriate places for each living thing. Without this skill, he would no longer be guardian of Fangorn Forest and keeper of memory.

British Celtic History

Legacy and names are part of the "Primary World" spiritual design in *The Lords of the Rings*. Family names track lineage, such as Aragorn son of Arathorn, and divulge historical mythology, as Tolkien says "... languages and names are for me inextricable from the stories" (*Letters* 214). The same is true for names and history in the *Mabinogion*. It should come as no surprise that mythological names and legends are the best way to find topographical references in

Wales. As previously stated, “one cannot walk through any area of a Celtic country without coming to realize, unless one is totally impervious to atmosphere, that geographical features are intrinsic to the myths and legends” (Ellis 326). For example, Branwen, Daughter of Llŷr in the Second Branch of the *Mabinogi*, is from Bardsey Island, or Isle of Mighty, located in Cardigan Bay in Wales. Pryderi is called the Lord of Dyfed; Dyfed is a province area located in Glamorgan, South Wales (Ford 57-59).

As in *Lord of the Rings*, ancient history passes into *Mabinogion* mythology. In 1813, a funeral urn was discovered “on the banks of the river Alaw, in Anglesey in a spot called Ynys Bronwen” (*Mabinogion* 288). The location was separated away from the path with “a stone or two peeping through the turf of a circular elevation on a flat not far from the river,” at which a heap of stones, “or *carnedd*, covered with earth” (*Mabinogion* 288). This discovery led Welsh to speculate the final resting place for the unfortunate heroine in the Second Branch of the *Mabinogi*. Years later, *Mabinogion* translator Lady Charlotte Guest visited the burial spot and confirmed it remained the place “called *Ynys Bronwen*, or Islet of Bronwen, which is a remarkable confirmation of the genuineness of this discovery” (389). According to Guest:

... those of Wales [naming places] are more frequently commemorative of some event, real or supposed, said to have happened on or near the spot, or bearing allusion ... such as *Llyn y Morwynion* “Lake of the Maidens” ... these names could not have preceded the events to which they refer ... some of these events and fictions are the subjects of, and are explained by, existing Welsh legends. (xvii)

As a “Primary World” reflection, it makes sense for Tolkien to have these guardians of memory maintain language. Names in Middle-earth reflect stories, and these stories will become historical legends. Treebeard mentions that these “songs like trees bear fruit only in their own time and their own way” but also mentions sometimes the songs “withered untimely” (II: 486). There is a definite sadness for Treebeard (and Tolkien) when mythology and its language (or history) is lost.

Language and History Merging into Narrative Design

Tom and Goldberry both “live in a kind of hunter-gather type of existence” in the Old Forest, and they are always tending to nature (Jones 67). However, like finding Elven realms in Chapter Three, seekers prepare for transition into the Otherworld. Guardians are spiritual initiators, so, not everyone can reach them. Tolkien shifts into a more appropriate Celtic language as the hobbits venture into the Otherworld.

When the hobbit group – Merry, Pippin, Frodo, Sam – reach the outskirts of the Old Forest, Merry takes them through a private entrance. As explained in Chapter Three, doors and other barriers are the more obvious transformations in Celtic tradition “preparing us sometimes for the typically allusive but instantaneous shift into a Celtic Otherworld” (Burns 50). In addition, there is movement; they have to go down a slope, into a tunnel, which leads to a gate, and finally at a door:

Merry got down and unlocked the gate, and when they had all passed through he pushed it again. It shut with a clang, and the lock clicked. The sound was ominous (I: 110)

Here, the hobbits are not in their normal comfort zone. This is Tolkien’s method of moving us away from the known and everyday or his “*modus operandi* ... a door is opened; water is crossed, and the familiar gives way to the strange” (Burns 50). The Old Forest is surreal, with “no sound, except an occasional drip of moisture falling through the still leaves” (Burns 111). The hobbits feel like all the trees are alive, studying them, “they all got an uncomfortable feeling that they were being watched with disapproval, deepening to dislike and even enmity” (I: 111). Indeed according to Tom, the trees are not only alive, but also to a certain extent have conscious thoughts.

Why do Fangorn and the Old Forest have such strange trees? In what way does this reflect Tolkien’s “Primary World” truth? In part, this is because of Tolkien’s dedication and fascination with trees. Environmentalism has always been personal for Tolkien saying, “human

maltreatment of them [are] as hard to bear as some find ill-treatment of animals” (*Letters* 220). His love for conservation, and a particular scene in *Macbeth*, led to the initial inspiration for the march of the Ents. In *The Tragedy of Macbeth*, Tolkien vents his frustration and “bitter disappointment” with the depiction of Birnam Wood, as no trees went marching into battle (*Letters* 212). This upset Tolkien. He kept this memory deep in his “unconscious” saying he would “devise a setting in which the trees might really march to war” (*Letters* 212).

Tolkien found this “Primary World” device in the Welsh poem *Cad Goddeu*. There, Taliesin witnesses the creation of “The Battle of Trees” or “Army of Trees” by the magician Gwydion. The powerful wizard gives “special powers ... to the trees ... [their] characteristics derive from traditions about sacred trees and sacred groves” (Ford 183). Indeed, Taliesin’s poem comprises of a list of trees and different allusions to their battle performance:

Alder, pre-eminent in lineage, attacked in the beginning;
Willow and rowan were late to the army;
Thorny plum was greedy for slaughter;
Powerful dogwood, resisting prince;
Rose-trees went against a host in wrath;
Raspberry bushes performed, did not make an enclosure
For the protection of life ... and honeysuckle. (Ford 184-85)

Gwydion successfully changed gentle-minded trees into fierce tree-warriors (Jones 66). There are some complexities in *Cad Goddeu*, but one thing remains clear: this poem is about tree-warriors. Jones argues that “this is what Tolkien wanted to see in the march of Birnam Wood” and that he felt “inspired negatively by *Macbeth* ... and positively by *Cad Goddeu* ...” (66). This creates one of the most exciting scenes in *Lord of the Rings*, with Treebeard’s battle cry towards Isengard: “They [Ents] are all roused now, and their mind is all on one thing: breaking Isengard ... what a thirst we shall have! ... let them march now and sing!” (II: 486).

Conclusions

Tolkien finds “Primary World” history, language and mythology with certain *Mabinogion* references. Treebeard and Tom are both Otherworld guardians and ancient keepers of history. By remembering history through verse and song, Tom and Treebeard find places for every living thing in Middle-earth. Both creatures share their knowledge with the hobbits as they are seeking guidance by their benefactors. In the end, the Ents create their own history and mythology and learn to help in the great war, with Treebeard saying “at least the last march of the Ents may be worth a song ... we may help the other peoples before we pass away” (II: 486).

Chapter 5

THE GREY PILGRIM

Tolkien and Gandalf

The Lord of the Rings relies heavily on the presence of the wizard Gandalf. As a cloaked figure of mystery, he often arrives unannounced and hardly ever elaborates on his whereabouts. His garb is fairly typical with a “tall pointed blue hat, long grey cloak, and a silver scarf,” but his elusive behavior keeps everyone in the Fellowship guessing about his true origins and real intentions (I: 25). Throughout the epic, Gandalf remains obscure, often slipping away under the protection of twilight or dusk. The British Celtic language and myth Tolkien uses helps conceal Gandalf’s identity. In truth, his mannerisms and history are similar to the legends of Merlin, or rather, the more ancient Welsh archetype Myrddin, and also the Welsh bard and prophet Taliesin. Gandalf’s death and later reincarnation reflects druidic transmigration of souls, a philosophy about acceptance upon death about rebirth, which reflects Tolkien’s “Primary World” truth of Welsh history and language in Middle-earth.

Who is Gandalf? He is a person of many names, thus morphing into many identities. Elves and Men of Gondor (men of Númenórean descent) say Mithrandir in Sindarin tongue, as “the added *rhandir* ‘pilgrim’ under RAN, taken with the added *mith* ‘grey’ under MITH,” so in Common Tongue this quite logically means Grey Pilgrim or Grey Wanderer (*Lost Road* 383). Men of Rohan, wary of his unexplained powers, suspiciously call him Gandalf Stormcrow; dwarves however respectfully call him Tharkûn, or Grey Man. Faramir of Gondor, brother to Boromir in the Fellowship, tells Frodo that Gandalf “... was, I now guess, more than a lore-master: a great mover of the deeds that are done in our time ... never spoke to us of what was to be, nor did he reveal his purposes” (II: 671). His wisdom and teachings spread far and wide throughout Middle-earth, but each group saw, or viewed, different sides of Gandalf. Or did each

group only see what they wanted about Gandalf? Is this deliberate? Perhaps Tolkien wants us to question the man, or enigma, making up the wizard.

Gandalf's enigmatic appearance plays into Tolkien's "Primary World" truth. Aside from Galadriel and Elrond, no one really understands what Gandalf is at all (*Letters* 180). Olórin is Gandalf's true name and he was born a Maiar, a race not belonging to the origins of Middle-earth. Maiar are "angelic immortals (incarnate only at their own will), the *Valar* or regents under God, and others of the same order but less power and majesty (such as Olórin= Gandalf)" (*Letters* 411).

After his reincarnation we see Gandalf emerge as the prophetic disciple in Middle-earth. As Tolkien's "Primary World" reflection, Taliesin, like Gandalf, is a great lore-master and reincarnated prophet. His exact origins are blurred, and at times he is like two separate people. Ford argues, "we are tempted to conclude that there were two independent traditions about Taliesin, one concerning a genuine poet, one a legendary shape-shifter (17). Two Welsh stories, "The Tale of Gwion Bach" and "The Tale of Taliesin," explain druidic transmigration of souls and spiritual mastery, which I will explain below. These tales are separate from *The Red Book of Hergest*, and *White Book of Rhydderch*, and are actually in the thirteenth-century manuscript *The Book of Taliesin*. Gandalf's death in Moria and reemergence as Gandalf the White does not make him two separate beings, though it appears so at first, as his spiritual awareness breaks from the lesser persona of Gandalf the "Grey" and drastically increases under Gandalf the "White."

British Celtic History: Taliesin as the Welsh Gandalf

Before his transition into reincarnated prophet like Taliesin, Gandalf must cross into the Otherworld, and does so by the narrow bridge of Khazad-dum into the Mines of Moria. According to scholar Sandra Miesel, he is preparing to himself for initiation into the Otherworld

and battle against the Balrog to increase his spiritual abilities as “his struggle with the Balrog is not a primary initiation but a re-experience of ritual death which raises him to a new level of spiritual perfection” (34). After his death Gandalf returns, but his persona changes. He is no longer grey but returns white, an Otherworldly color. Indeed, his initial meeting with Gimli, Legolas and Aragorn is confusing with his new spiritual awareness, as his old name and life is a distant memory: “‘Gandalf,’ the old man repeated, as if recalling from old memory a long disused word. ‘Yes, that was the name. I was Gandalf’” (II: 495). His white hair and robes glow and emit warmth. His physical and mental appearance has changed so dramatically that it catches his companions completely off guard:

‘Gandalf!’ He said. ‘But you are all in white!’
 ‘Yes, I am white now,’ said Gandalf. ‘Indeed I *am* Saruman, one might almost say, Saruman as he should have been. . . . I have passed through fire and deep water since we parted. I have forgotten much that I thought I knew, and learned again much that I had forgotten.’ (II: 495).

Gandalf’s return is an example of druidic Celtic transmigration of souls, which Tolkien would have wanted for his “Primary World” truth, and wisdom gained from his former life. In Celtic literature, transmigration of souls is a druidic belief that souls pass from one body to another be it animal, human or inanimate object. Celtic scholar Caitlin Matthews argues this is shown as “a simultaneous belief in metamorphosis (a changing of one’s shape), metempsychosis (a passing of the soul into another form), and reincarnation (a rebirth into a different human life)” (*Celtic Spirit* 375). For instance, in the Second Branch of the *Mabinogi*, “Branwen daughter of Llŷr” the Welsh God Bran orders his own head to be cut off and taken to Gwynfryn (white mount) in London and have it buried with “its face towards France” (Ford 70). This band of warriors, The Assembly of the Noble Head, carried the head to its final resting place as ordered by Bran. This constitutes importance evidence of early Celtic belief and transmigration of souls, as Bran did not die but lived on spiritually. The head is buried in London “to ward off plague, so long as if remained

buried there” implying there will be consequences if the physical head is removed, perhaps rebirth into a new body (Ford 58).

Like Gandalf before his ‘rebirth’ as an enlightened prophet, Taliesin goes through reincarnations. The first example of early Taliesin is in the “Tale of Gwion Bach.” A female magician Ceridwen has an ugly son, Morfran or “Great-crow” that she wants to give special powers to in order to compensate for his ugly appearance. Ceridwen is skilled in three arts – magic, enchantment, and divination – and she decides to brew a spell to give her ugly son the art of prophecy. She sets a blind man to stir the contents and has Gwion Bach kindle the fire. After one year and a day, three drops appear in the cauldron but instead of them falling upon Morfran they land on Gwion Bach, who shoved Morfran out of the way. Ceridwen awoke and intended to kill Gwion Bach for his insolence. As she pursues Gwion he shifts into a hare, so she changes into a black greyhound. Then he changes into a fish, and she an otter. Then once again he shifts into a bird, and she a hawk. Finally, rushing into a barn, he changes into grain amongst a pile of wheat. Ceridwen shifts into a hen and swallows Gwion. Ceridwen carries him for nine months then gives birth. After she bore him she couldn’t bear to kill him, so instead, sets him upon the sea. Eventually he was found floating among the coracle by Elphin and “As soon as Elphin saw the forehead, he said, ““behold the radiant forehead (i.e. *tal iesin*)!”” ... People suppose this is the spirit of Gwion Bach, who had been in the womb of Ceridwen” and is then reborn into a powerful prophet (Ford 162-65). Taliesin survives the trials set before the Dark Earth Goddess, Ceridwen, and became a powerful *cyfarwydd* (storyteller) at court. In “The Tale of Taliesin,” Taliesin establishes his supremacy over other king’s poets and his prophetic wisdom by saying, “Official chief-poet / to Elphin am I / And my native abode / is the land of the Cherubim ... Johannes the prophet / called me Merlin / But now all kings / call me Taliesin (Ford 172).

According to Miesel, Taliesin's shifting is indicative of shamanism: "once initiated into his calling by mystical death and resurrection a shaman can send forth his soul at will to penetrate the heavens or the underworld ... he is a seer, a healer, a psychopomp, and a master of fire" (33). Like Taliesin, Gandalf is also both seer and master of fire, calling himself the "servant of the Secret Fire, wielder of the flame of Anor" (II: 330). Both descend into the Otherworld. But instead confronting the witch, or Dark Goddess, Gandalf fights a Balrog, another ancient creature:

'Long time I fell,' he said at last, slowly, as if thinking back with difficulty.... we plunged into the deep water and all was dark. Cold it was at the tide of death: almost it froze my heart ... Yet it had a bottom, beyond light and knowledge ... We fought far under the living earth, where time is not counted ... far below the deepest delvings of the Dwarves, the world is gnawed by nameless things ... I threw down my enemy, and he fell from the high place and broke the mountain-side where he smote it in his ruin. Then darkness took me, and I strayed out of thought and time, and I wandered far on roads that I will not tell.'
'Naked I was sent back – for a brief time, until my task is done. And naked I lay on the mountain-top ... There I lay staring upward, while the stars wheeled over, and each day was a long as a life-age of the Earth.' (II: 501-02).

It is a physically laboring and intensive journey against an adversary, and both undergo "a contest of strength or wit or will" (Burns 71). The greatest attribute of Celtic transmigration is no past dependency on previous incarnations. Rather, "the Celtic attitude towards transmigration draws upon the bodily and genetic knowledge of former lives to inform this life in active and positive ways" (*Celtic Spirit* 375). This is a positive reflection of remaining in the present, not just in the past, carrying wisdom from previous lives. Indeed, Gandalf and Saruman were sent to Middle-earth "by the Lords of the West to contest the power of Sauron, should he arise again, and to move the Elves and Men and all living things of good will to valiant deeds" (*Silmarillion* 299). The wizards, or in Elvish *Istari*, were emissaries sent to "train, advise, instruct, arouse the hearts and minds of those threatened" (*Letters* 202). Their greatest gifts enable men to see their full potential; they are necessary to help people of Middle-earth fight past spiritual complacency.

Transmigration of Souls: ‘Primary World’ Reflection

Despite his migratory lifestyle in Middle-earth, Gandalf loses his true way. Over time, Gandalf the Grey becomes weak and loses spiritual knowledge. The wizards fail. He forgets his past and purpose, even the leader of the White Council, Saruman, embraces power to covet the One Ring. Tolkien says at this crucial moment “the crisis had become too grave and needed an enhancement of power” (*Letters* 202). Gandalf, like Taliesin, faces his fear and dies. Gandalf and Taliesin transcend physical death to be reborn from stars, the universe, and the physical womb of Earth and the Dark Goddess, respectively. Taliesin recites his history and origins to a great king saying:

I was with my lord, in the heavens, When Lucifer fell into the depths of hell ... I was revealed in the land of the Trinity; And I was moved Through the entire universe; And I shall remain till doomsday, Upon the face of the earth. And no one knows that my flesh is – Whether meat or fish. And I was nearly nine months in the womb of the witch Ceridwen; I was formerly Gwion Bach, But now I am Taliesin. (Ford 172-173)

Gandalf faces an evil beast born of fire and shadow; Taliesin faces the Dark Goddess before death. Why is this significant and a reflection of Tolkien’s “Primary World” truth? According to Campbell, “threshold guardians ward away all incapable of encountering the higher silences within ... once inside he maybe said to have died in time to return to the World womb, the World navel, the Earthly Paradise” (*Hero of a Thousand Faces* 92). These threshold guardians test the spiritual endurance and capabilities for their captors. Both are “archetypal poet, seer, diviner, prophet” but by experiencing death will come back with greater understanding and rewards (Ford 18). Taliesin experiences the heavenly fall with his Lord and witnesses the creation of the universe. Subsequently, he is reborn by the Goddess, or great initiator. For Celtic society, the poet “was understood to have supernatural and divinatory powers ... in Celtic tradition the power had the power to lose his spirit to seek out knowledge, in whatever quarter that was to be had” (18). For individual advancement in the spiritual world, surrendering to the ultimate fate is “having

died to ... personal ego” and then arising once again “established in the Self” (*Hero of a Thousand Faces* 243). Like Taliesin, Gandalf “spans the ages before and after the Creation” and he is the prime inspirer to humanity (Tolstoy 219). Taliesin and Gandalf are reborn as strong, spiritual leaders. In pseudo-death they connect to shamanistic practices, elevating their souls to a higher spiritual plane. Campbell argues that the “hero is the champion of things becoming, not of things become because he is” (243). And certainly, Taliesin and Gandalf are both champions of things that will become, raising other men to action. According to Burns, shamans use alternative ways to reach out to the spirit world or another realm. Only after returning from their journeys do they gain “exceptional knowledge, retrieve a valuable object, or rescue a wandering soul” (71).

Gandalf as Welsh Shaman

As shamans, Gandalf and Taliesin have totem or helper animals. Celtic scholar Caitlin Matthews describes totem beasts, especially within the *Mabinogi*, as:

Otherworldly helpers whose resonance is with the ancestral source of wisdom: the adoption of such a totem is a powerful link with the Otherworld, conveying not only the virtues and qualities of that beast to the person under its aegis but also contact with ancestral levels. (*Mabon and the Mysteries of Britain* 131)

Taliesin transforms into hare, fish, bird and finally grain. Through each of the shifts he undergoes transference of wisdom from the Dark Goddess Ceridwen: “These changes correspond to certain levels of poetic training during which the initiate is given deeper and deeper insights into the nature of creation” (*Mabon* 118). His transformations through a succinct link of totems build on top of the other until he is reborn, thus becoming her protégé; Ceridwen’s training of spiritual understanding and greater wisdom has passed on (but ultimately, not to her ugly son). Totems are important because they “speak with the unified voice of the Ancestors and the land” and, to gain knowledge of the land, one must suffer (*Mabon* 144).

Helper animals assist Gandalf with his transformation from Grey to White. Gwaihir, the Lord of Eagles, appears in time of great need. As Gandalf lay upon the mountain crest, newly reborn after the fierce battle with the Balrog, Gwaihir Windlord finds him:

he took me up and bore me away.
 ‘Ever am I fated to be your burden, friend at need,’ I said.
 ‘A burden you have been,’ he answered, ‘but not so now. ... The Sun shines through you ...’ (II: 502).

On an ancestral level Manwë, an angelic Valar and the eagles’ creator, chose Eagles to watch closely over Middle-earth. In turn, Olórin – now Gandalf the White – now becomes their guardian, like Manwë. Like the Eagles he is chosen to protect Middle-earth. Gandalf also gains the trust of another important animal, the lord of all horses, Shadowfax.

Shadowfax is “chief of the *Mearas*, lord of horses ... the horse of the White Rider.” (II: 504). It is not a coincidence that Shadowfax chose Gandalf. Spiritual connections of animal/hero “symbolize the extra-human, otherworldly or unconscious ground of his nature” (Rees and Rees 232). The Celts held horses in high esteem often mentioning them in the *Mabinogion*. Like in the First Branch of the *Mabinogi*, white animals are magical creatures from the Otherworld. Rees and Rees argue that “in mythology, animals are not mere brutes; they are possessed of a supernatural intelligence and power” (232). Shadowfax “shines[s] like silver, and runs[s] as smoothly as the swift stream ...” (II: 504). The color and bond between both indicate Gandalf and Shadowfax are powerful entities, with a deeper level of spiritual understanding.

The bond between horse and hero like Shadowfax and Gandalf is unmatched in Welsh mythology, and is a perfect example of Tolkien’s “Primary World” truth. In the *Welsh Triads* Bromwich notes, “these creatures [horses] evidently belong to the class of Helpful Animal Companions engendered at the same time as a hero, and destined to assist him at some crisis in his life” (98). Indeed, there is particular reverence given to horses in the *Triads*. Quite a few references were given to the “Three Chief Steeds,” “Three Lively Steeds,” and even “Three

Horses who carried the Three Horse-Burdens” (*Troedd Ynys Prydein* 99-109). The color is descriptive – slender grey, black-tinted, or spotted dun – followed with their appropriate riders or handlers “Pale White Lively-Back, horse of Morfran son of Tegid” (Bromwich 103). Likewise, in the First Branch of the *Mabinogi*, Prince Pryderi, the son of King Pwyll and Queen Rhiannon, grew up with a magical colt (Ford 52). Like Gandalf, his destiny is interwoven with his totem animal. Yet unlike Gandalf there are “no stories in which Pryderi and his foal ride to daring adventures” (Matthews 33). However, *Mearas* are not ordinary horses, only nobility can ride them. Before Gandalf, he was the noble steed to King Théoden, Lord of Rohan. But once King Théoden grants Gandalf a boon, he swiftly asks to permanently ride the Shadowfax into battle:

I will choose one that will fit my need: swift and sure. Give me Shadowfax! He was only lent before, if loan we may call it. But now I shall ride him into great hazard, setting silver against black: I would not risk anything that is not my own. And already there is a bond of love between us. (II: 522)

There is a clear bond between man and beast. Riding Shadowfax, who previously belonged to King Théoden and “whom no other hand can tame,” Gandalf’s status is elevated (II: 509).

Campbell argues that “the idea of the insulating horse [is] to keep the hero out of immediate touch with the earth and yet permit him to promenade around the peoples of the world” (*Hero of a Thousand Faces* 224). He no longer walks the land as Gandalf the Grey, but rides across it as Gandalf the White.

Language and History Merging into Narrative Design

As Tolkien’s “Primary World” reflection, there is still the Welsh mythology version of Gandalf. Myrddin, the Welsh Merlin, is moody and distant, often preferring to live alone in the woods. Often, he succumbs to fits of madness, and during his fits writes detailed prophecies. In Geoffrey of Monmouth’s *Vita Merlini*, Myrddin lived in the “forest of Celyddon in the western lowlands of Scotland” (Jones 71). Myrddin loses his identity and becomes a Wild Man living

among trees, animals and wore sparse clothing. This man of early fifth century Welsh poetry, Myrddin Wyllt “dressed in animal skins and accompanied by his familiars” (Tolstoy 18). According to scholar Nikolai Tolstoy, Merlin would appear “among civilized men without warning to counsel or admonish,” and then leave just as quickly “to his wilderness retreat” (219). While Gandalf the Grey was not quite so extreme, he did live as a nomad outside of society. Like a pilgrim, he traveled extensively. His refused conformity and often his wise, prophetic advice would baffle others.

In personality, Myrddin and Gandalf are not entirely different. Gandalf is melancholy, distant and impatient. Gandalf’s power inspires others, but there are times of considerable impatience on his part. There is a fine line between the power to inspire, or the power to manipulate, says Tolkien: “leading to the desire to force others to their own good ends, and so inevitable at last to mere desire to their own wills” (*Letters* 237). For example, after growing impatient with Bilbo, Gandalf’s anger “seemed to grow tall and menacing; his shadow filled the little room” (I: 34). Though-out *Lord of the Rings*, scholars have criticized characters for appearing either too good, or too evil, with hardly any grey in between. However, I do not agree with them; Gandalf is not a dichotomy. His ambiguity and sudden bouts of temper show an overlapping good/bad, grey, persona. Tolkien critic Patrick Grant argues that Gandalf’s Wise Old Man disguise or archetype is deliberate trickery that he “is also an ambivalent figure, like Merlin, in whom the enantiodromia of good and evil can appear most paradoxically” (170). Evil is characterized by power dominating other wills, and though certainly Gandalf wishes to change the minds of others, he never does so by force. Though born as spirits, the wizards or *Istari* “were incarnated in the life-forms of Middle-Earth, and so suffered the pains both of mind and body” (*Letters* 237). And so, wizards suffer the same human temptations and limitations. There is an empathetic understanding, physical and spiritual, for the *Istari* with living creatures in Middle-

earth. As a reflection of truth, Tolkien argues it is possible for all living creatures to have periodic episodes of corruption, lending itself to a grey persona, rather than black/white:

Trees may “go bad” as in the Old Forest; Elves may turn into Orcs ... Elves themselves could do evil deeds. Even the ‘good’ Valar as inhabiting the World could at least err; as the Great Valar did in their dealings with the Elves; or as the lesser of their kind (as the Istari or wizards) could in various ways become self-seeking. (*Letters* 287)

But whereas orcs are certainly almost always bad, humans possess the capability of good/bad overlapping personality traits, a quality Gandalf has.

Why the trickster or Old Wise Man disguise? According to Nikolai Tolstoy, “the ultimate purpose of the Trickster myth is to remind man of his first attainment of the gift of consciousness ... represents a return to an earlier primitive state of consciousness” (239). All primitive archetypes have a good and bad side. While representing the trickster archetype, Gandalf is a lightning rod showing the content of other people’s character. Indeed, although members of the Fellowship are distrustful of Gandalf, they still respect and follow his advice. However, Men of Rohirrim are less certain, and consequently act more archaic and primitive in nature. They are frightened and wary of his wizardry. They accuse him of conducting evil spells or being a spy for Saruman, or phantoms of some evil craft (II: 508-509). Éomer of Rohan states that “‘Gandalf Greyhame is known in the Mark; but his name, I warn you, is no longer a password to the king’s favour ... a bringer of evil, some now say’” (II:435). Théoden, under Saruman’s spell, says he is the bearer of ill news, “troubles follow you like crows ... why should I welcome you, Gandalf Stormcrow?” (II: 512-13). The trickster appearance demonstrates an outside mentality towards new ideas and thoughts. Celtic scholar Jones argues “what they create occurs as the result of the breaking down of old structures so that something new has the mythological room to be created” (75). Being a trickster is something out of the ordinary and has the flexibility to help create order out of chaos. In addition, this “quality is seen as magical, and thus ... tricksters are also often wizards, magicians, or sorcerers” (76). Gandalf ticks many of these boxes. He is already known

for his pyrotechnical devices, and the Rohirrim are suspicious of his actions. He must often be prodded to explain himself, and his prophetic advice is baffling to some. If Tolkien is searching for “Primary World” truth, the trickster archetype explains duality in human nature. Good leads to “understanding and fellowship” and bad leads to “death, isolation, and the loss of identity or self (Grant 170).

So, why did Saruman turn out differently than Gandalf? They both have similar spiritual origins as angelic-Maiar, and can appear as a trickster archetype. What happened? Indeed, Saruman was not initially evil, but his desire for the One Ring did corrupt him. Unlike Gandalf, Saruman exerts control of pure dominance and evil. He does not sacrifice himself towards the greater good, like Gandalf. Instead, even his voice is corrupt with evil:

For many the sound of the voice alone was enough to hold them enthralled; but for those whom it conquered the spell endured when they were far away, and ever they heard that soft voice whispering and urging them. (II: 578)

Like Gandalf, Saruman at one time wandered the land. Treebeard says there was a time “when he was always walking about my woods. He was polite in those days, always asking my leave (at least when he met me); and always eager to listen ... (II: 473). But he withdrew and disconnected himself from the land, remaining inside of Isengard: “He has a mind of metal and wheels; and he does not care for growing things, except as far as they serve him for the moment” (473). There is a pervasive sacred connection, or disconnection in Saruman’s case, with the earth. In the Fourth Branch of the *Mabinogi*, Math son of Mathonwy, a powerful magician, also keeps his feet off the ground. He only set his feet on the ground when the country is at war (Ford 93). Math, like Saruman, values power, and opposes standing at an equal human level, as if the connection with earth will drain his power. Saruman, unlike Gandalf, is led astray from the *Istari*’s modus operandi and becomes too self-serving, much to his own demise.

Conclusions

Even though British Celtic language is not a strong part of this chapter, Welsh mythology and history contribute to the ambiguity of Gandalf's identity. In his search for "Primary World" truth, Tolkien created a prophetic, spiritual leader for his epic. He does so by setting up Otherworldly trials, leading up to Gandalf's death, and subsequent reincarnation. This calls to mind Taliesin, the Welsh bard and prophet, in regards to druidic transmigration of souls, and his return as a stronger individual. In addition, the trickster or Wise Old Man archetypes allow for good/evil dualities to overlap, creating grey areas in human nature, not just all good or all bad constructs. This is important to challenge, break down, and create new mythologies and conscious thought. Gandalf's character tests the limits of human endurance and character, without overpowering or manipulating them, like Saruman.

Chapter 6

ARAGORN AS WELSH ARTHUR

The transformation of Aragorn to King Elessar builds over the course of *The Lord of the Rings*. But from the moment Aragorn as Ranger Strider first appears in the Prancing Pony at Bree, his appearance became more than just a solitary Ranger. Tolkien admonishes even he was not fully prepared for his uncertain arrival: “Strider sitting in the corner at the inn was a shock, and I had no more idea who he was than had Frodo” (*Letters* 216). In *Lord of the Rings* the multiple identities of Strider, Aragorn, and King Elessar all complete a holy trinity for the perfect medieval warrior as “the noble exile, the true heir, the bearer of the legendary sword, the fulfillment of prophecy” (Jones 112). Aragorn is the prophesized hero of Númenórean descent, sharing his noble blood lineage with ancient Elves. He is a homeless wanderer, an orphaned heir to a destroyed kingdom (Miesel 58). As a “Primary World” reflection, Aragorn’s concealment and subsequent series of trials in the Otherworld are a spiritual rite of passage and are themes in Welsh mythology. His subterranean descent through the Path of Dead has otherworldly assistance as he transitions from Ranger to King (Davies 228). When Aragorn emerges he begins a rapid transformation into the mythological ‘May King,’ paving the way into the fourth age and revitalizing Middle-earth’s stagnant lands.

Identity Concealment

Aragorn is an ancient hero and medieval champion out of old legends. As Middle-earth’s moral compass, Aragorn leads with his heart and mind. As part of his ‘exile king guise,’ Aragorn – as Strider – blends into his surroundings immaculately, almost too well. Frodo’s first impression of Aragorn is “a strange-looking weather-beaten man, sitting in the shadows near the wall ... he wore a hood that overshadowed his face; but the gleam of his eyes could be seen” (I:

156). However, his disguise could not be kept secret from Frodo; the hobbit senses more behind the façade: “why the disguise? Who are you? ... I think you are not really as you choose to look” (I: 166). Though well hidden, his inner appearance could not conceal the man underneath. Tolkien and Celtic scholar Dimitra Fimi attributes this inner enlightenment to his noble descent of Half-Elven, men of Númenór, whom possess “enrichment of the ‘racial structure’ ... they ‘ennoble’ the Men of Middle-earth” (*Tolkien, Race and Cultural History* 154). Aragorn camouflages himself well and can deceive temporarily, but he is unable to hide his true origins and heritage for all time.

Identity concealment is also prevalent in the *Mabinogion*. In the First Branch of the *Mabinogi* “Pwyll, Prince of Dyfed,” the human Pwyll and Lord of the Underworld Arawn shape-shift to conceal their identities for one year, providing stellar leadership and prosperity in each of their respective lands. In the Fourth Branch, the magician Math and his nephew Gwydion change shape and present themselves as poets to gain information and trust (Ford 35). Lastly, Math also uses shape-shifting and concealment as punishment, changing the shapes of Gwydion and Gilfaethwy against their will into animals (35). The movement between shapes and identities is affected without difficulty. As an example of Tolkien’s “Primary World” truth, shape-shifting is to conceal and learn to bear witness. In the First Branch, Pwyll and Arawn bear witness and learn secrets in each other’s Otherworld and Welsh kingdoms, and both eventually accomplish their tasks and are made into stronger individuals. Math gleans information, deceives while concealed, and enacts punishment and retributions on others through identity concealment. With Aragorn concealing his identity he learns hidden intentions, and protects his safety from evil beings.

British Celtic History – Arthur and Aragorn

Tolkien thought it detrimental for myth and fairy-story to reflect, as an art, elements of “moral and religious truth” (*Letters* 144). It was important that his “Secondary World” did not

explicitly reflect the religion of present day but to subtly reflect ancient moral principles: “I am speaking, of course, of our present situation, not of ancient pagan, pre-Christian days” (144).

Tolkien wanted to create an English epic, but still desired “the fair elusive beauty that some call Celtic” and above all, wanted a “heroic legend on the brink of fairy-tale and history” (144).

Aragorn, like Arthur, are two figures both connected to destiny, fate and historical legends.

Tolkien would have preferred the ancient Welsh Arthur to use as a “Primary World” model, rather than the more modern version.

In the *Mabinogion* tale “Culhwch and Olwen” Arthur is cousin to Culhwch, the protagonist; Arthur offers assistance for Culhwch to find Olwen, daughter of a chief-giant, so he can marry her. His warriors do not call him ‘King Arthur’ but Arthur warrior-chief (Ford 125). As chief, there is deep respect from his followers and they fondly call him “Chief of the nobles of this island” (Ford 125). In early eighth-century Welsh poems, Arthur is a “figure of renown” adding that historically Arthur has been a man respected if not revered by his people (Rees and Rees 71). In the *Mabinogion*, Culhwch yells to his cousin Arthur saying, “Hail, chief of the kings of this island ... may your grace and your word and your honour in this island be all-encompassing” (Davies 183). As chieftain-warrior, battle-ready men and loyal warriors always surround Arthur. His presence is dominant, but respectful; he carries himself like a medieval prince in exile.

Aragorn is also Chieftain among his Ranger warriors, who are Númenórean descendents, “he seemed to Men worthy of honour, as a king that is in exile, when he did not hide his true shape. For he went in many guises, and won renown under many names ... Thus he became at last the most hardy of living Men ...” (*Lord of the Rings* 1060). As a “Primary World” reflection, Aragorn is spiritually guided by his destiny. He was born with the dignity of ancient kings with wisdom, strength, and healing. There is an inner glow and outer light all around him, which is

revealed to all as King (III: 968). In British Celtic mythology there are legends, or pre-determined fate, that Arthur would deliver his people from their unyielding oppressors (Rees and Rees 71). It is a prophecy in which Arthur cannot escape. Taliesin prophesizes that a legendary lord of the Britons will fight against invading forces in Wales; this chosen king is the great equalizer, restoring harmony:

Their lord they shall praise.
 Their language preserve,
 And their land they will lose—
 Save wild Wales.
 Until comes a certain period
 After long servitude,
 When shall be of equal duration
 The two proud ones.
 Then will the Britons gain
 Their land and their crown
 And the foreigners
 Will disappear. (Ford 181)

Like the legendary Arthur, Aragorn cannot escape his prophecy. Indeed, he has internally accepted this and physically prepared for kingship his entire life. When the Hobbits meet Aragorn in Bree they become aware of his foretold destiny by reading Gandalf's letter:

*All that is gold does not glitter
 Not all those who wander are lost;
 The old that is strong does not wither,
 Deep roots are not reached by the frost.
 From the ashes a fire shall be woken,
 A light from the shadows shall spring;
 Renewed shall be blade that was broken
 The crownless again shall be king. (I: 173)*

Aragorn's presence in *The Lord of the Rings* constitutes legendary mythology in present day, within the third age. While others read legendary tales, believing them to be fantasy, Aragorn recognizes them as ancient truths. What was once history has now become myth. History, myth and language are central ingredients for Tolkien's "Primary World" reflection. This reflection is

apparent when Frodo and Aragorn witness the ruins of Aragorn's ancient homeland, and both have starkly different reactions, which will be explained shortly.

Aragorn and Arthur are calculating risk takers. Aragorn's years in the wilderness turns him into a strong, fair king as Tolkien argues: "in Aragorn Elessar the dignity of the kings of old was renewed" (1044). Aragorn's earliest advisor, Elrond, instructs him on his destiny to achieve where his forefathers have failed:

Aragorn, Arathorn's son, Lord of the Dúnedain, listen to me! A great doom awaits you, either to rise above the height of all your fathers since the days of Elendil, or to fall into darkness with all that is left of your kin. Many years of trial lie before you. You shall neither have wife, nor bind any woman to you in troth, until your time comes and you are found worthy of it. (*LOTR* 1059)

Aragorn fights with his men having "spent decades learning everything there was to know about his opponent, gathering intelligence, protecting the helpless, fighting against the rising powers of Sauron" (Jones 119). Joseph Campbell argues that the battlefield is symbolic to the field of life, as each creature lives off the death of another, and a strategic fighter is a well-armed fighter (*Hero with a Thousand Faces* 238). Aragorn falls on the side of good, but carries with him an "aura of risk" because of the choices he has to make (Burns 71). For example, Aragorn risks revealing his identity concealment from Sauron by looking into the Stone of Orthanc, this could have jeopardized their advantage: "...to know that I lived and walked the earth was a blow to his [Sauron] heart ... he knew it not till now" (III: 780). But luckily, Aragorn learns Sauron's war strategy instead "he saw me, but in other guise than you see me here" (III: 780). At last, he promises aid: "I saw coming unlooked-for upon Gondor ... I have no help to send, therefore I must go myself" (III: 781). He would not ask anything of his men that he would not do himself. Aragorn's bravery and selflessness make him a beloved leader and pinnacle of strength.

Like Aragorn, Arthur tests his war strategies by using his wits and endurance. In the Welsh poem, *Preiddeu Annwn, Spoils of the Underworld*, Arthur leads a band of warriors into the

realm of the dead to “restore to life any dead warrior placed within in” and receives knowledge from the Otherworld (*Arthurian Tradition* 17). Arthur’s struggle for sovereignty is like a game of chess. In the *Mabinogion* tale “Rhonabwy’s Dream” Arthur and his nephew Owain spar over a game of *gwyddbryll*, a “game with pieces of gold and a board of silver” (Davies 220). Similar to chess, both spar against one another using just their wits, and having warriors, ravens as their chess pieces. The story is slightly frivolous, as each are pitting deadly moves against each other, calling out “your move” at the end of each term. Finally, Arthur crushes the game pieces to golden dust, and combat ceases like nothing happened. An underlying interpretation is that Arthur continuously rises to battle when necessary, forever defending his sovereignty perhaps even in the Otherworld (*Arthurian Traditions* 19).

In “Fairy-Stories,” Tolkien claims myth and history are virtually one in the same, as ancient language and history take shape from the same cauldron, as discussed in Chapter One. Tolkien seeks truth in mythology because he is “historically minded” as a philologist (*Letters* 239). By taking history, language and myth from the “Primary World” into his “Secondary World” Tolkien creates a familiar place in Middle-earth, like an ancient Britain. Likewise, Aragorn’s ancient Númenórean lineage is now ancient legends, mythology; the history is lost to all but the record-keepers. For example, Frodo witnesses the magnificent remnants of the Númenórean North Kingdom, Minas Arnor, Aragorn’s ancient homeland, but cannot understand the remnants historical and mythological significance. He feels the presence of old-world beauty, but cowers under the imposing statues:

Upon two great pedestals founded in the deep waters stood two kings of stone: still with blurred eyes and crannied brows they frowned upon the North. ... in each right hand there was an axe; upon each head there was a crumbling helm and crown. Great power they still wore, the silent wardens of a long-vanished kingdom ... Awe and fear fell upon Frodo, and he cowered down ... (II: 392-93)

Campbell argues that facing mythology makes us “feel the rapture of being alive” (*Power of Myth* 5). But the “awe and fear” might have been too much for Frodo, given his lack of life experience and historical knowledge. He is still learning about himself and his own spirituality. Scholar Joseph Campbell argues that it is important to reclaiming truth in myth, because mythic imagination has no boundaries between cultures; myth bridges our past, present and future (*Power of Myth* 5). In addition, Frodo may be realizing his own mortality under the shadow of forgotten statues.

While Frodo cowers under the statues, Aragorn meets it without flinching. He recognizes the sad, forgotten truth in the former North Kingdom, but feels pride in reclaiming his ancestral Númenórean lineage:

In the stern sat Aragorn, son of Arathorn, proud and erect, guiding the boat with skillful strokes; his hood was cast back, and his dark hair was blowing in the wind, a light was in his eyes; a king returning from exile to his own land.
‘Fear not!’ he said. ‘Long have I desired to look upon the likenesses of Isildur and Anárion, my sires of old. (*Fellowship* 393)

Aragorn’s reconnection, and Frodo’s simultaneous disconnection, demonstrates how forgotten history passes into myth. It forces Aragorn and Frodo to think of their mortality and legacy. After witnessing his ancestral homeland, it is time for Aragorn’s transition into kingship. To do so, he must pass a rite of passage through the spiritual Otherworld.

British Celtic Language – Otherworld Descent

Aragorn’s subterranean descent into the Path of the Dead is the turning point of his spiritual and psychological development into king. This is a test foreseen by elders, as Aragorn tells Legolas and Gimli, “This is the word that the songs of Elrond bring to me from their father in Rivendell, wisest in lore: *Bid Aragorn remember the words of the seer, and the Paths of the Dead*” (III: 781). Frodo says to Faramir that “Aragorn is descended in direct lineage, father to

father, from Isildur Elendil's son himself. And the sword that he bears was Elendil's sword" (II: 664). Aragorn's constant testing is a religious observance or spiritual pilgrimage, like Gandalf's test and reincarnation. His wanderings are not meaningless, but rituals of reenactment. This mythological device – death, growth, and renewal – is imperative towards restoring balance and harmony in Middle-earth.

His first step is facing death in the Otherworld. The Path of the Dead removes Aragorn and his warriors from the normal world into the Celtic Otherworld, quite literally underground. This is a symbolic route, or rite of passage, as the Welsh call the Otherworld *Annwfn* “*an* (‘in, inside’) + *dwfn* (‘world’) ... generally believed to be either on an island or under the earth” (Davies 228). According to Campbell, crossing the ancient threshold is like two worlds, “divine and the human ... different as life and death, as day and night” (*Hero with a Thousand Faces* 217). While underground, Aragorn negotiates peace with ancient deserter spirits that previously abandoned his forefather Isildur. Through this reconciliation, Aragorn bridges past and present, life and death. As discussed in Chapter Three, the Otherworld focuses ancient energies allowing the seeker to pursue, seek and recognize a higher truth. In this aspect, Tolkien's “Primary World” truth for Aragorn is reconciliation. Calling the ancient spirits of the past, and having them fulfill their former oaths forgive all. This binds Aragorn to the Otherworld.

Once they reach the Hill of Erech Aragorn summons the dead at the Stone of Erech, along the walls of Dol Amroth. He cries out:

The hour is come at last. Now I go to Pelargir upon Anduin, and ye shall come after me. And when all this land is clean of the servants of Sauron, I will hold the oath fulfilled, and ye shall have peace and depart for ever. For I am Elessar, Isildur's heir of Gondor. (III: 789)

Aragorn's journey gives eternal peace to his past and dignity to the deserter spirits. His descent leads him on a path of no return. He exits no longer as Ranger, but on the path towards king.

Tolkien argues that “no other mortal Men could have endured it, none but the Dúnedain of the

North” (II: 790). Likewise, in the First Branch of the *Mabinogi* Pwyll assists Arawn, the Otherworld Lord, and emerges from *Annwfn* changing his name from Pwyll, Prince of Dyfed to “Pwyll, Head of *Annwfn*” (Ford 42). Aragorn calls himself Elessar after ascending from the Path of the Dead. Finally, Aragorn has passed the Otherworld test and is ready for battle.

Language and History Merging into Narrative Design

After the brutal battle at Pelennor Fields, Aragorn is the great restorer in the Houses of Healing. His task is to heal mind, body and spirit, as part of his legacy towards growth and renewal for the land. According to scholar Leslie Miesel, his life is a mirror for the classic universal cycle:

- 1] The King is deposed or slain.
- 2] A temporary king or interrex is appointed.
- 3] The king or future king is purified or performs penance.
- 4] The king engages in symbolic combat with Death, Blight, etc., and makes a sacred marriage. The new king is crowned or the old one reinstated.
- 5] The community celebrates restoration, usually with banquets. (11-12)

At this point in *The Lord of the Rings*, Aragorn sits at number three. Denethor, Steward of Gondor and false king, has died. Théoden, King of Rohan, is dead. Aragorn’s first act is purification and baptismal washing, cleansing all the disparity and chaos from Middle-earth. Ioreth, an old serving woman in the Houses of Healing, cries out, “Would that there were kings in Gondor, as there were once upon a time, they say! For it is said in old lore: *The hands of the king are the hands of a healer*” (III: 861). Aragorn, now as Elessar, turns to Éomer saying:

‘Verily, for in the high tongue of old I am *Elessar*, the Elfstone, and *Envinyatar*, the Renewer’: and he lifted from his breast the green stone that lay there. ‘But Strider shall be the name of my house, if that be ever established. In the high tongue it will not sound so ill, and *Telcontar* I will be and all the heirs of my body. (III: 863)

Aragorn took the leaves of *athelas* or *kingsfoil* and “breathed on them, and then he crushed them ... and then he cast the leaves into the bowls of steaming water that were brought to him, and at

once all hearts were lightened” (III: 865). Nature and the hands of the king revive Faramir and Éowyn, bringing them back from darkness.

The presence of water implies life, which is why many water goddesses are female, like Galadriel in Chapter Three. The Houses of Healing conduct a spiritual baptism, a bond between Christianity and paganism, which asserts Aragorn’s authority as the true king. Here is another example of Tolkien’s “Primary World” truth. The baptismal revival is “known to all systems of mythological imagery” which reinforces Tolkien’s search for truth in mythology (*Hero of a Thousand Faces* 250-51). In Christian lore, water washes away original sin, but in older mythology, like Welsh myth, water is cleansing and renewal. In Christian mythology, Jesus answered Nicodemus about the rites of baptism as an inherent truth for spiritual cleansing and forgiveness by saying: ““Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and the spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God”” (251). Likewise, in British Celtic mythology, baptismal offerings also demonstrate revival and awakening as in *Lord of the Rings*. In the Fourth Branch of the *Mabinogi*, the Goddess Aranrhod gives birth to a son, to which her brother Math, son of Mathonwy, baptizes as Dylan. Soon after his baptism, Dylan makes for the sea and “took on the sea’s nature and swan as well as the best fish in the sea ... no wave ever broke beneath him” (Davies 54). Dylan returns to the Womb of the Earth, the spirit of eternal self in the ocean. In another example, Math creates a woman by taking flowers from “oak ... broom ... meadowsweet, and from those they conjured up the fairest and most beautiful maiden” and then baptizes her with the name Blodeuedd (Davies 58). Both narratives focus on spiritual awakening of birth by Womb of Goddess and perform blessings, creating life. Like a priest, Math sprinkles holy water, and recites spells in place of prayers. As stated above, Aragorn crushed the sacred leaves, breathed on them and cast them into “bowls of steaming water” before saying to Faramir

“walk no more in the shadows, but awake!” (III: 865-66). Both are examples are baptismal rituals which blessings, prayer, and create a spiritual awakening away from darkness.

Return of the Celtic King

There have been hints about the reappearance of the Celtic king in *The Lord of the Rings*. In the “Journey to the Cross-Roads” chapter, Frodo, Sam and Gollum cross a decapitated stone king, Argonath. Frodo exclaims to Sam that the “King has got a crown again!” and on closer inspection a “trailing plant with flowers like small white stars ... as if in reverence for the fallen king” lying about the decapitated stone head (II: 702). In Celtic mythology, the soul is in the head, symbolic of the king to be crowned. Celts were not head-hunters; they just held much reverence and respect towards a person’s head. Some heads were “placed in sacred Celtic rivers as votive offerings” (Ellis 20). In the Second Branch of the *Mabinogi*, Brandigeidfran orders his head to be cut off and taken to London to ward off the plague, with his head positioned towards France. Bran tells the group that it will take a long time to reach the destination, with “feasting in Harlech for seven years, with the birds of Rhiannon singing to you” but promises to keep good company the entire time “as it ever was when it was on me” (Davies 32). The king continues to live, offering sworn protection despite decapitation. This is evidence that great kings, like Arthur and Aragorn, do not die in legends but continue to live by serving and protecting their people.

As the Celtic May King, appropriate vegetation and seasonal association surround Aragorn. He is able to heal wounds with *kingsfoil*, and ascends the throne as “Elfstone” or his Adúniac (language of the Númenóreans) name, Elessar, meaning ““Lord of the Tree”” (Miesel 12). Within the walls of Minas Tirith, Gondor, Citadel guards wear traditional dress to reflect implications of the Celtic King, and his association with nature:

...robed in black, and their helms were of strange shape, high-crowned with long cheek-guards ... were set the white wings of sea-birds ... Upon the black surcoats were

embroidered in white a tree blossoming like snow beneath a silver crown and many-pointed stars. This was the livery of the heirs of Elendil, and none wore it now in all Gondor, save the Guards of the Citadel before the Court of the Fountain where the White Tree once had grown. (III: 752-53)

Aragorn's coming of age as Celtic King is tied together with a young White Tree. The White Tree of Gondor descends from the first blessed trees in Middle-earth, created by the Valar (*Letters* 206). As Tolkien's "Primary World" reflection, the White Tree is symbolic of true Númenórean rule "it is to be presumed that with the reemergence of the lineal priest kings (of whom Lúthien the Blessed Elf-maiden was a foremother) the worship of God would be renewed" (*Letters* 206-7). Like Aragorn's concealment, the White Tree sapling remained "hidden on the mountain, even as the race of Elendil lay hidden in the wastes of the North" (III: 972). Finding the sapling is a favorable omen for Middle-earth's renewal as the "young sapling tree no more than three foot high ... upon its slender crown it bore one small cluster of flowers whose white petals shone like the sunlit snow" (III: 971). Aragorn transplants it in the court of the fountain, where it flourishes. The tree is a catalyst towards new beginnings. This particular mystical tree for Aragorn "is a manifestation of the sacred and a means of communicating with divinity" as he now has become the Celtic May King (Miesel 18). In Celtic mythology, Beltane is celebrated with festivities to honor the Gods for spring revival, which according to Frasier, "The Midsummer festival must on the whole have been the most widely diffused and the most solemn of all the yearly festivals celebrated by the primitive Aryans in Europe" (737). Aragorn is one with the land, and through this renewal harmony can be achieved, "the fates of Tree, King and Nation are [all] interdependent" (Miesel 20).

Conclusions – Spiritual Truths

As the White Tree of Gondor blossoms on Mid-summer's Eve, Aragorn, King Elessar, weds Arwen Undómíel, Elrond of Rivendell's daughter. Arwen is the archetype for Lady of

Sovereignty in British Celtic mythology, an Otherworld lady. Celtic scholar Caitlin Matthews argues that the Celtic King must marry the Lady of Sovereignty to enhance his power and make the land whole “by right of his union with her, by his championship of her freedoms and privileges which he lawfully assumes” (7). In addition, their union reunites ancient royal bloodlines. Indeed, Arwen and Aragorn are very distant cousins:

Eärendil is Túor’s son & father of Elros (First Kind of Númenor) and Elrond, their mother being Elwing daughter of Dior, son of Beren and Lúthien: so the problem of the Half-elven becomes united in one line. (*Letters* 193)

With the Half-elven bloodlines reunited under the protection of nature, reunification and healing within Middle-earth begins (III: 973).

The Elf-human union between Lúthien and Beren is the first union, which influences the Aragorn, Arwen love story. They are keenly aware of repeating their ancestor’s actions. This is due in part with the Celtic transmigration of souls, which again is “a simultaneous belief in metamorphosis (a changing of one’s shape), metempsychosis (a passing of the soul into another form), and reincarnation (a rebirth into a different human life)” (*Celtic Spirit* 375). According to Ellis, “the Celts taught that death is only a change of place and that life goes on, with all its forms and goods, in the Otherworld. When a soul dies in this world, it is reborn in this one” (20). While singing the Lay of Lúthien, Aragorn catches sight of Arwen’s stark resemblance to Lúthien “fair as the twilight in Elven-home; her dark hair strayed in a sudden wind, and her brow were bound with gems like stars” (1058). Finally, when Aragorn regains his composure and his voice he cries out, “*Tinúviel, Tinúviel!* Even as Beren had done in the elder Days long ago” (1058). Tolkien argues that Arwen is not directly Lúthien’s reincarnation, as that would be impossible in his mythic history, but a descendent “very much like her in looks, character, and fate” (*Letters* 193).

The merging of mythic history for Aragorn unfolds in *The Lord of the Rings*. In the end, he is no longer a homeless wanderer on a sacred pilgrimage, but the Celtic May King who

revitalizes Gondor from the brink of destruction. Aragorn's concealment and Otherworld trials shape his coming of age spiritual rite of passage and personal growth. Aragorn emerges victorious, transforming completely to the Arthurian sires of old: Elessar.

Chapter 7

CONCLUSIONS

In the beginning of this thesis, I said I wanted to present clear reasoning for Tolkien's fascination with Welsh and how Welsh worked its way into spiritual components within *The Lord of the Rings*. By reading *The Mabinogion* and *Red Book of Hergest* translations, Tolkien would have discovered Welsh mythology, language, and history within the British Isles. Throughout every chapter, I have clearly referenced all spiritual aspects within *Lord of the Rings*. In addition, I discussed Tolkien's personal involvement with Welsh throughout different stages in his life, and gave an in-depth exploration about the historical implications of British Celtic mythology. Once again, it is my hope this will contribute to the conversation about Celtic literature and the genre of fantasy.

Tolkien had a difficult time separating myth from history, much like his Welsh counterparts, and famously stated that history "resembles 'Myth' because they are both ultimately of the same stuff" (*Monsters* 127). This principle intrigued me for its simplicity and complexity. I could begin to understand that *The Lord of the Rings* was not only his greatest epic but also a reflection of his vision of spiritual, or moral, truth. After reading "Fairy-Stories" and *English and Welsh*, I took into consideration that Welsh language, his basis for Sindarin, and Welsh mythology, history contribute to the parallel between Tolkien's "Primary World" (our world) and the spiritual aspect of his "Secondary World" (his created world).

However, it goes without saying that Tolkien had a difficult time with Celtic mythology. His love of Old English and Germanic reigned supreme, but Tolkien could not deny that British mythology helped shape his favorite literature, saying: "Arthurian world . . . powerful as it is, it is imperfectly naturalized, associated with the soil of Britain but not with English" (*Letters* 144). He still desired to create an English epic. But to have believable "Primary World" reflections in

their “Secondary World” it was necessary for the inclusions of Welsh language and mythic references. Having both overlapping Saxon and Celtic material transformed *The Lord of the Rings* into a British epic. By including Welsh language a host of traditional Welsh mythological archetypes followed, too. Welsh legends and songs preserve to this day landscape names throughout Britain, which would otherwise be lost to the English language.

Mythic Archetypes: Welsh Mythology in Tolkien’s Lord of the Rings opened broadly, charting Tolkien’s involvement with Welsh language and history. However, as each chapter unfolded, the thesis focused more on individual and spiritual phenomena in his writings (including both characters and locations). In the end, Chapters One through Three examined British Celtic language, British Celtic history, and how these two merged into Tolkien’s narrative design. Midstream, as it were, *Mythic Archetypes*, alters its focus, moving to a specific consideration of Tolkien’s version of the Otherworld. The Otherworld discloses a space where individuals seeking higher wisdom go through a series of tests, or trials, to prove their spiritual growth. So it is that Chapters Three through Six all document the Otherworld in some way – it is only here that Tolkien’s characters put the blade to the heat, only here that individuals emerge as strong, well-balanced individuals.

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